

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Making the Bible Belt: Preachers, Prohibition, and the
Politicization of Southern Religion, 1877-1918**

by

Joseph Locke

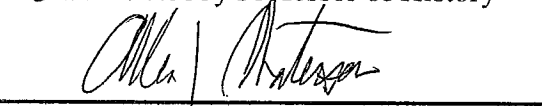
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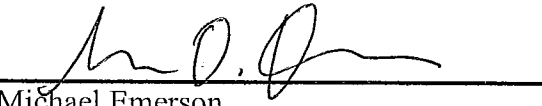
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ABSTRACT

Making the Bible Belt: Preachers, Prohibition, and the Politicization of Southern Religion, 1877-1918

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H.L. Mencken coined “the Bible Belt” in the 1920s to capture the peculiar alliance of religion and regional life in the American South. But the reality Mencken described was only the closing chapter of a long historical process. Like the label itself, the Bible Belt was something new, and everything new must be made. This dissertation is the history of its making.

Over the course of several decades, and in the face of bitter resistance, a complex but shared commitment to expanding religious authority transformed southern evangelicals’ inward-looking restraints into an aggressive, self-assertive, and unapologetic political activism. Late-nineteenth-century religious leaders overcame crippling spiritual anxieties and tamed a freewheeling religious world by capturing denominations, expanding memberships, constructing hierarchies, and purging rivals. Clerics then confronted a popular anticlericalism through the politics of prohibition. To sustain their public efforts, they cultivated a broad movement organized around the assumption that religion should influence public life. Religious leaders fostered a new religious brand of history, discovered new public dimensions for their faith, and redefined religion’s proper role in the world. Clerics churned notions of history, race, gender, and religion into a popular political movement and, with prohibition as their weapon, defeated a

powerful anticlerical tradition and injected themselves into the political life of the early-twentieth-century South.

By exploring the controversies surrounding religious support for prohibition in Texas, this dissertation recasts the politicization of southern religion, reveals the limits of nineteenth-century southern religious authority, hints at the historical origins of the religious right, and explores a compelling and transformative moment in American history.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	1
<i>CHAPTER ONE</i> Heretics, Infidels, and Iconoclasts: The Freewheeling Religious World of the Late-Nineteenth Century	23
<i>CHAPTER TWO</i> Subduing the Saintly: The Anticlerical Tradition	64
<i>CHAPTER THREE</i> Of Tremor and Transition: Spiritual Crisis and the Origins of Clericalism	96
<i>CHAPTER FOUR</i> The Road to the Bible Belt: Mobilizing the Godly	127
<i>CHAPTER FIVE</i> Triumph in the Churches: The Clerical Insurgency	158
<i>CHAPTER SIX</i> Conquering Salem: Myth and Memory in the Struggle for the Bible Belt	189
<i>CHAPTER SEVEN</i> The Marker of Morality: Race, Righteousness, and the Origins of the Bible Belt	222
<i>CHAPTER EIGHT</i> Unto the Breach: The Politics of Clericalism	268
<i>CHAPTER NINE</i> Anything That Ought to be Done: The Triumph of Clericalism	310
<i>CONCLUSION</i>	352

INTRODUCTION

On an August afternoon in 1885, several thousand Texans crowded into Waco's Padgitt's Park to hear Congressman Roger Q. Mills and former state Attorney General George W. Clark decry prohibition and excoriate the "political preachers" championing it in that county. Two brass bands played at intervals and, after the two men's speeches, the rally broke for two hours so the crowd, seated at six 400-foot-long tables, could enjoy barbecue and lemonade. United States Senator Richard Coke then addressed the crowd. He told of the gravity of the Prohibition issue. He told his listeners that the churches directed the battle. And he reminded them that it was a political battle. "Ah, my fellow-citizens," Coke said, "whenever your preachers go into politics, scourge them back!" The crowd cheered. "Our forefathers were driven to the country seeking freedom of conscience against the persecutions of state religion and shall we now combine church and state?" No! cried the crowd. "The worst sign of the times that I can perceive is to be found in the delivery of stump speeches on the holy Sabbath day from God's pulpit." The crowd cheered louder than ever. The senator continued on about the pure gospel, about isolating religion from public life, and about all the widows and orphans and bloodshed charged to alliances of church and state. The crowd only cheered the more. Well-versed in Coke's brand of anticlericalism, the tropes and images and fears came all too easily to mind. Prohibition collapsed, the Senator was later reelected, and public opinion muzzled politicized religion.¹

¹ *Galveston Daily News*, August 30, 1885; *The Dallas Weekly Herald*, September 3, 1885.

Whatever nineteenth-century southerners called their world, it was not “the Bible Belt.” Today, the region we know by that name exudes its faith. Political prayer rallies, school board battles, faith-based politics: the South’s pervasive religiosity bleeds so heavily into American life that the melding of region and religion seems to have been inevitable, if not timeless. But everything has a history. The Bible Belt has not always been the Bible Belt. Although distinguished scholars have ascribed its “origins” and its “beginnings” to the evangelical ferment of the early-nineteenth century, few nineteenth-century southerners would have used the term.² The acerbic journalist H.L. Mencken coined the phrase in the 1920s, he later recalled, “to designate those parts of the country in which the literal accuracy of the Bible is credited and clergymen who preach it have public influence.”³ The label stuck: it neatly captured a commonly held assumption, something everyone knew to be true but lacked the vocabulary to define. But the reality that Mencken described was only the closing chapter of a long historical process—and the beginning of something else entirely. Like the label itself, the Bible Belt was something new, and everything new must be made. This is the history of its making.

“The corruption of the present is so unspeakably appalling that disaster frowns upon the brow of the future,” future Senator Morris Sheppard told a Methodist youth group in 1896.⁴ Two years later, a group of Texas Methodists resolved that “We have reached in the order of Divine Providence a crisis that is recognized by the most

² John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Bible Belt* (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1996); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

³ Stephen W. Tweedie, “Viewing the Bible Belt,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* XI (Spring, 1978), 865-876. See also Charles Reagan Wilson, “The Bible Belt,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, edited by Samuel S. Hill et al, (Mercer University Press, 2005), 117.

⁴ Morris Sheppard, “His Eloquent Words on the Influences of the Epworth League,” speech delivered in San Antonio, 1896. Morris Sheppard Papers, 1894-1953, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

thoughtful minds of Christendom.”⁵ Spiritual anxiety wracked the post-Reconstruction South. Nervous religious leaders exhausted themselves cataloging their many complaints. They denounced the era’s spiritual laziness and its lifeless commercial creed. They mourned the indolent preachers tending languid, half-filled churches. Disorganized denominations wrangled amongst themselves while barrooms, theaters, and dance halls tentacled themselves into every town and hamlet. Preachers were ashamed of their enduring powerlessness. They abhorred the hostile culture that contained them, the tired traditions that muzzled them, the histories that indicted them, and the politicians who despised them.⁶

To mainstream southerners of the nineteenth century, a minister’s place was his pulpit and his focus was spiritual. Many northern evangelicals chased the millennium and strove for a benevolent empire; southerners demurred. Despite some ministers’ unprecedented activism in championing slavery, promoting secession, and bolstering the Confederacy, a prevailing anticlericalism—a very real and potent regional force—demanded that “political preachers” be met with great walls of condemnation. In Texas, as elsewhere throughout the region, venom and vitriol were a cleric’s reward. Vicious waves lashed against “pulpit politicians.” It was in this context that Texas senators and congressmen could tell adoring audiences to scourge back preachers who left their

⁵ *Minutes of the Twenty-Second Annual Session of the Northwest Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Dallas: Ewing R. Bedford, 1888).

⁶ For national anxieties, see especially T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981) and Paul A. Carter, *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age* (DeKalb : Northern Illinois University Press, 1971). For the South, see especially Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) and Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

pulpits, assuring their listeners that “hell was full of such political preachers.”⁷ Before religious leaders could earn Mencken’s derision, before the sarcastic cynic could coin the “Bible Belt” and have it mean anything at all, religious activists had to conquer greater obstacles at home. And they did. They built an intoxicating and empowering ideology, assembled organizational resources for a mass mobilization, and rallied the religious behind the banner of moral reform. For disfranchised preachers lusting after power, politics became their medium.

Although issues ranging from education to disfranchisement consumed religious activists, none matched the alluring, world-in-the-balance intensity of prohibition—the legal proscription of alcohol. Building upon longstanding Protestant commitments to temperance, southern religious leaders commonly regarded alcohol as the age’s greatest malady. They scoured their vocabularies to express their unmitigated hatred. And so they threw themselves into prohibition. Clerics used that single issue as a battering ram, and the impact from each blow burst lingering barriers to the full flowering of the Bible Belt. It ripped apart a culture of anticlericalism and gave evangelicals a clear path to the heart of their culture.

Over the course of several decades, a complex but shared commitment to religious empowerment transformed evangelicals’ self-conscious timidity into an aggressive, self-assertive, and unapologetic activism. Their zealotry trampled all moderation and cloaked their insurgency in the aura of inevitability. But, of course, the creation of the Bible Belt was never predestined. It had to be fought for and won.

⁷ Richard Coke told Texans to “scourge” political preachers in 1885. *Galveston Daily News*, August 30, 1885. Two years later, in a debate with Baptist minister B. H. Carroll, Senator Roger Q. Mills pointed to the preacher and said “Hell was full of such political preachers—so full that their legs are hanging out of the windows.” A. M. Perry to B. H. Carroll, January 11, 1892, Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection, Archives, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Through the politics of moral reform, two cultures clashed. Clerics and anticlerics vied for legitimacy. Never hidden, this battle for the Bible Belt need not be “read backwards” or found hidden “between the lines.” It was consciously waged, conspicuously fought, and frequently commented upon. The struggle filled newspaper columns, sermons, political contests, conversations, and the private reflections of many thousands of Texans. If the weight of the present veils the possibility of an American South struggling to define the proper bounds of religion—and at times stifling those who favored its expansion—it need not. Beyond assumptions of a tranquil region united in religion lurks the roaring, culture-splitting turbulence from which the Bible Belt was made.

As it explores this epochal transformation in the history of American religion, this study situates itself firmly within the historiography of southern religion. Born amid the civil rights movement, the field’s pioneering works emphasized constraint. Scholars—often native southerners—grappled with the easy acquiescence of southern white churches to a culture of white supremacy. Samuel Hill, reflecting on his path-breaking *Southern Churches in Crisis*, admitted that “the crisis of those years provoked the study.” How could southern churches, he asked, “miss the ethical demands of their black southern neighbors and of the region’s historical opportunity to set right what had been so oppressive for so long?”⁸ Amid such momentous controversy, these southerners looked on, dumbstruck, as their churches stood idly by. Obsessed with this moral failure, early scholars such as Hill, John Boles, and Donald Mathews found the roots of paralysis in a distinctly regional religion. Southern evangelicals, they argued, privileged an otherworldly individualism and could never develop the social ethic necessary to

⁸ Samuel S. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), xiii, xv.

challenge the prejudices of their culture. Southern religion (usually restricted to white evangelicalism) was, and had been, in “cultural captivity.”⁹

Captivity defined the field. Even critics operated within its parameters. Some, captivated by northern movements and refusing to surrender southern churches to Menckenesque scorn, groped in desperation to discover strains of a southern social gospel. Sometimes they found it. At its best, the search revealed stunningly vibrant variations of a “social Christianity.”¹⁰ Too often, however, the search distracted scholars from native, regional forces by burdening southern religious history with false imperatives. Decades later, the question of a southern social gospel is tired and worn. It lingers mostly for embarrassed southerners yearning after its road-not-taken promise. For scholars reared on the vitality of southern religion and the potency of the Christian Right, other questions arise that ask not why the South failed to emulate the industrial North and Midwest—why would it?—but instead seek to engage the South on its own terms. Let them probe the Bible Belt.

Epistemologically suspect and prone to historiographical exaggeration, the captivity thesis survives today—as do so many aged, easily definable theses—mostly as a foil for legions of new, hostile studies. Recent works waste pages congratulating themselves for transcending its timeworn constraints. Nevertheless, the parameters of the

⁹ See especially Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis*, and John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972). Joe Coker has recently applied this approach to the study of southern prohibition by emphasizing the movement’s capitulation to southern prejudices. Joe L. Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause: Southern White Evangelicals and the Prohibition Movement* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

¹⁰ For the social gospel in the South, see especially J. Wayne Flynt, “Dissent in Zion: Alabama Baptists and Social Issues,” *Journal of Southern History*, 35 (November 1969): 523-42; John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); and, in Texas, John Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity, 1900-1980* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986).

captivity thesis do offer one last, shining beacon for a study of the Bible Belt. For if religion can be captive to culture, it can also, as others have acknowledged, capture a culture.¹¹ This is part of the pattern of clericalism in Texas. The burden, therefore, is to rediscover that long, difficult quest for religious authority and recapture the creation of the culture that compelled it. But that requires working within new paradigms as well. It demands a critical engagement with the emerging themes of more recent scholarship.

Diversity and dynamism are the new imperatives of southern religious history. Scholars are emphasizing the varieties of regional faiths and discovering a spectrum of belief and practice belied by such static monikers as “evangelicalism” or “the Bible Belt.”¹² This welcome recognition long ago unsettled “southern religion.” It broke the monolith into pieces. Scholars combed the remnants and found many manifestations of southern faiths and developed dozens of new historiographies.¹³ But if the monolith has shattered, our histories need not follow the pieces into isolation. They can be incorporated into a new whole. We need not abandon the idea of a single southern “religion.” The idea is capacious. It contains multitudes. And they are in dialogue. We have only to train our ears and listen.

The exposed fault lines of the fractured field reveal that conflict and controversy—not stability—wreck the history of the region’s religion. It is a history of contingencies, not constancies. But it is *a* history. It is the sum of friends, rivals, and acquaintances, the whole of the relationships that intersect, amalgamate, separate, and

¹¹ In the creation of a Lost Cause religion, Charles Reagan Wilson writes that “the culture was a captive of the churches.” Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), 12. Paul Harvey suggests the same in his *Redeeming the South*, 4.

¹² Beth Barton Schweiger even urges historians to abandon the term “evangelicalism.” Donald Mathews, et al., “Forum: Southern Religion,” *Religion and American Culture* 8 (Summer, 1998), 147-177.

¹³ In recent years, for instance, robust new historiographies have developed around Colonial Anglicans, Appalachian Protestants, and southern Pentecostals.

intersect again. They are the cast of characters in a traveling troupe, players on a shared stage, and their production is a truer and more textured history than any one-man show.

By conceding variety and consolidating the gains of recent scholarship, a new religious history can move beyond questions of definition and division and seek unity in shared experience. The new history arises at the intersections of rivalries real and imagined. There it finds common ground for the “lumpers” and “splitters” to reunite and put behind them the much-ballyhooed “disintegration of commonality.”¹⁴ Together, they can construct new, more expansive narratives of southern religious history.¹⁵ They can reconcile rival religious traditions and incorporate the religious with the nonreligious and the irreligious. A fuller, truer understanding of southern religion awaits. By destabilizing but not abandoning “southern religion,” we can expand our vision. We can begin to bring religion out of the churches.

Religious history must never be narrowly conceived. Religion transcends pulpits and pews. It bleeds into the world. Texas pew-sitters, for instance, weren’t Baptists or Presbyterians on Sunday, then farmers or lawyers the remaining six days of the week. Individuals carry their religious and secular identities together. The two are enmeshed. Those who read their denominational newspaper took the daily paper, as well. Everywhere and always the sacred and the secular moved together, intertwined and inseparable. The best religious history, then, transcends an easy, inward-looking myopia. Scholars of southern religion long ago broke away from their old parochial apologia, and

¹⁴ Over a quarter of a century ago, Thomas Bender notably pled for new synthetic histories in the pages of *The Journal of American History*. Thomas Bender, “Wholes and Parts: The Need for Synthesis in American History” *The Journal of American History* 73 (June 1986), 120-136.

¹⁵ Paul Harvey offered one model for a black-white synthesis in his *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

few cling to the internal squabbles and esoteric theological debates of hermetic religious history. A mechanical procession of denominational newspapers, conference proceedings, and church minutes no longer suffices. The pronouncements of religious leaders no longer avail. Only a textured, multi-perspective investigation fully captures the scope of religious history.¹⁶

A more vibrant scholarship lusts for the bone and sinew of religious experience. By emphasizing the interplay of the sacred and the secular, it constructs a stereoscopic image of depth and nuance, of conflict and controversy, and of winners and losers. It reimagines the stakes. It recaptures the life-and-death intensity of partisans, and it repopulates the past with the cares and concerns of those who lived it. Tumultuous conflicts and revolutionary triumphs reveal themselves. This study addresses one such triumph: the decades-long process to realize the Bible Belt.

Although history's much-discussed "cultural turn" is now gray-haired, back-pained, and aching for retirement, historical notions of religion are still in swaddling clothes. Long ago, historians wrote about women and discovered gender; they wrote about nonwhites and discovered race. Yet, today, it remains too easy to write about religion without knowing what it truly means to be religious. History shows that the boundaries of the sacred are malleable—they change and expand, they embody first one thing and then another. Religion, often at critical moments, acquires new meanings and new imperatives. The quest for the Bible Belt furnished one such moment. The clerical crusade fundamentally altered what it meant to be religious. It filled spiritual identity with such salience that at times it broke down and trampled over such simple segregating

¹⁶ See especially David Hollinger, "The 'Secularization' Question and the United States in the Twentieth Century" *Church History* 70 (March 2001), 132-143; and Jon Butler, "Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History" *The Journal of American History* (March 2004), 1357-1378.

difference markers as race and gender. It variously intensified or destabilized the barriers separating American and non-American, white and black, male and female. As religious Texans quested for righteousness, they manufactured an all-encompassing, us-and-them division: saints versus sinners, secular versus sacred. It collapsed or absorbed rival identities and entangled itself in others. The lines delineating religiosity, whiteness, and respectability, for instance, all but disappeared, consumed by the desperate imperatives of faith. It became difficult to see where the clerics' religion ended and other social and cultural divisions began.

Ultimately, however, this is a simple story. "Making the Bible Belt" reconstructs the religious conquest of southern life in the years after Reconstruction. It details how religious identity intensified, muscled its way to the fore, reoriented lives, and changed the way southerners saw the world. It seeks to understand what impelled so many churchgoers to wage unceasing war on a new and horrible host of imagined enemies. The imperatives of religion awoke many to culture, politics, and public life. Clerics Christianized ideas of history, race, family, and education. All of these became the proper targets of sacred warfare. They seemed suddenly to beg for the religious touch. Christianity had to be everywhere and always.

As the dreams of activists outpaced reality, religious southerners comprehended crisis. They lived in that crisis, interpreted their world through it, and lived their lives shackled by its anxious chains. And they hated it. Lost to emptiness, they yearned for the visceral and ecstatic touch of God. They plotted against their spiritual void and schemed strategies for its destruction. They worked to bring down the pillars of their unjust world and decided that human agency, rather than divine grace or providence, best promised

release from their spiritual calamity. They would have to free themselves. Through action, exertion, and conscious purpose, they created the Bible Belt. Perhaps they never found their new Jerusalem, their Zion, but the world and their religion were never the same again.

Long before William James famously called for the moral equivalent of war, southern clerics had found it in the clerical crusades. Religious activists channeled their new aims through denominationalism, a reinvigorated spirituality, and through politics. The momentum machines churned. The movement grew. Spiritual warfare engrossed the region. Within a generation or two, southern clerics transformed a freewheeling conglomeration of clashing traditions into a powerful, self-assured, efficient crusade of righteous conviction. Soon the weight of religious reform trampled over all. Evangelical Christians applied their morality to the world, developed the standards by which to judge a nation, and assembled the materials for the Bible Belt. But it was not made in isolation—it was forged in conflict.

Fierce opposition challenged the clerical insurgency at every step. The struggle shaped its development: the Bible Belt grew in dialectic. Freethinkers, traditionalists, secularists, and jealous politicians all manned the battlements to crush the crusade. They resisted, and their resistance shaped the product. The intensity of their defiance should come as no surprise: anticlericalism has a rich and vibrant role in southern history. Yet it remains underexplored, almost ignored, in scholarship. As historians have explored the region's many faiths, they have yet to take seriously the region's many *unfaiths*. Samuel Hill's exhaustive *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, as historian Art Remillard first noted, contains no entries for "irreligion," "atheism," "skepticism," "free thought," or

“anticlericalism.”¹⁷ It is as though the triumph of the Bible Belt created a singularity, a moment in time past which some phenomena become incomprehensible, even unimaginable. How can the Bible Belt have once spoken an anticlerical idiom? How could the region have done anything but buckle before the demands of an evangelical faith? But the sources scream loudly that they could, and they did. This study intends to open new avenues of inquiry by probing the vigor and assertiveness of southern anticlericalism. Anticlericalism—formally defined as opposition to the interference or influence of religion, churches, or clergy in public affairs—oriented generations of southerners. It needs its history.¹⁸

Such a study can reap multiple benefits in the New South era. The field of southern religion has not advanced uniformly. “If religion in the Old South has become a mature field,” Paul Harvey wrote in 2002, “scholarship on the era since the Civil War is still, relatively speaking, in its adolescence.”¹⁹ Little has changed in a decade. Recent works by Harvey, Ted Ownby, Daniel Stowell, Beth Barton Schweiger, and others are crafting elements of a core narrative, but the religious world of the turn-of-the-century

¹⁷ Art Remillard, “What about Southern Irreligion?,” *Religion in American History: A Group Blog on American Religious History and Culture*, February 26, 2010, <http://usreligion.blogspot.com/2010/02/what-about-southern-irreligion.html>

¹⁸ Historians most often associate anticlericalism with Western Europe and Latin America, areas where the realities of institutionalized Catholicism kept the issue salient. It is no accident that southerners so often referred to Protestant “priesthoods” and “Romish” plots, but as the sources of such epithets suggest, anticlericalism could thrive in mostly Protestant countries as well, adapted to the demands of religious disestablishment and evangelical religion. Anticlericalism, it must be remembered, is not synonymous with irreligion or incompatible with religiosity—southern clergy and laity embraced it. Anticlericalism confined the actions and thoughts of religious leaders. It delegitimized a whole range of clerical activity and effectively blocked transgressions by “political preachers” with fierce and determined opposition.

¹⁹ Paul Harvey, “Religion,” in Rebecca Mark and Robert Vaughn, *The South* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 408. Daniel Stowell reached similar conclusions in his study of the post-Civil War South: “The scholarship of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras is voluminous and especially rich, but too few scholars have examined the religious life of the postwar South.” Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 10.

South remains opaque.²⁰ It lacks the clear contours of mature scholarship. There is no New South equivalent to Donald Mathews *Religion in the Old South*. Despite the inevitable multiplication of scholarship and contributions by excellent historians, the era remains among the dark matter of religious scholarship, a dull, crank-winding phase of what Jon Butler called the historian's notion of an American "jack-in-the-box" faith. Trapped between the historiographical magnets of the Confederacy and the religious right, the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries cry out for scholarship of their own. The clerical conflict can provide the structure for an integrated study of religion and public life. By narrowing the scope of inquiry, examining only one theater of a much wider conflict, anticlerical opposition comes immediately into focus. Its intensity and vividness can emerge. Texas offers the perfect setting to explore the interplay of religious activism with anticlerical suspicions. It presents stunning views of the many-sided emergence of the Bible Belt.

Historians of southern and national religion have yet to comprehend and appreciate the Lone Star State. Stunted by notions of Texas exceptionalism, the state's religious history stands isolated. The history that produced George W. Bush's faith-based presidency, that collected the largest population of American evangelicals in one state, that sent apostles of the "Texas theology" across the Sun Belt and Midwest, and whose school board policies now dictate national education: this history holds key insights for the history of American religion.

²⁰ Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Mere presentism, that much-derided but ever-functioning idea that history should explore contemporary concerns, proposes Texas as a proper area study. Size itself confers merit. In keeping with the state's trademark boast, religion *is* bigger in Texas. Every week, more than forty thousand Texans attend the largest single church in the country, Lakewood Church, in Houston. In fact, four of the ten largest churches in the United States are Texas churches. When Houston's Sagemont Church erected a 170-foot-tall cross along Interstate 45 in 2009, it became the *second*-largest cross in Texas. The scope of Texas religion is staggering. There are more evangelicals in Texas than any other state. If the Baptist General Convention of Texas withdrew from the Southern Baptist Convention, it would instantly become the seventh- or eighth-largest denomination in the United States. In fact, there are more Baptists in Texas than there are Jews or Mormons in the entire country.²¹ But Texas religion extends beyond mere numbers. Its vitality and influence have shaped history.

The 2010 wrangling of the State Board of Education over the presentation of evolution in science textbooks and the portrayal of religion in history books drew national and international attention. Texan David Barton and his WallBuilders organization are spearheading a surge among conservative leaders to Christianize American history. And, of course, George W. Bush's rise to the White House introduced the nation to the unique brand of "faith-based" politics he honed so successfully in Texas. But these recent trends are but capstones to an impactful Lone Star story that originated in the struggle for the Bible Belt. Fundamentalist and megachurch pioneer J. Frank Norris cut his teeth on the moral crusades before he introduced southern religion to the Midwest

²¹ Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center: 2008); Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2008* (Hartford, Conn.: Trinity College, March 2009).

and the rest of the nation. Southern California's apostle of fundamentalism, Robert "Fighting Bob" Shuler, learned to fight in the Texas prohibition campaigns. In fact, as historian Darren Dochuk recently chronicled, the Christianization of the Sun Belt depended upon a "Texas theology" that westward migrants carried with them into southern California.²² That ill-defined concept requires a precision that can only be discovered in these crucial decades. The struggle for the Bible Belt reveals new dimensions and uncovers the impacts of many others. Many Texans made their mark on American history, from Methodist Bishop Edwin Mouzon's joint efforts with colleague James Cannon to turn the South away from the "party of the fathers" in 1928, to W. A. Criswell's leadership in capturing Southern Baptists for fundamentalism and the Republican Party in the late-twentieth century, to George W. Bush's and Rick Perry's perfection of religious politics. For its religious intensity, historical impact, and faint historiography, Texas beckons historians.

Texas, of course, as biased boosters might boast, is often not a typical southern state. Never wholly southern, Texas has always been, or just as often imagined itself to be, a sort of geographical collision of South, Southwest, and West. It was a frontier for much of the nineteenth century and a beachhead of the Sun Belted South during much of the twentieth. But Texas nevertheless offers vistas on the creation of the broader Bible Belt. Clerical and anticlerical forces jostled for decades. It is no accident, for instance, that in 1960 John F. Kennedy chose Texas to allay Americans' suspicions of church-state alliances, or that, in 2000, Texan George W. Bush could publicly pronounce Jesus Christ

²² Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), xvii-xviii, 30, 153, 156, 402.

his favorite political philosopher and reap political rewards. The tensions of the Bible Belt are tightly wound in Texas. Unwinding them reveals wonderful insights.

Seduced by what historian Marc Bloch called “the idol of origins,” this dissertation explores the Bible Belt’s pained origins story. It is its biography. But it is more than a simple, intergenerational chronicle of the Bible Belt. It is also the history of the culture that made it, the conflicts that defined it, and the world it created. The weaving of religion and region wrought a wonderfully textured tapestry; but we must behold that tapestry in its making and discern how its many threads were woven.

The story begins in the freewheeling religious world of the late-nineteenth century. Eschewing a neat, homogenous collection of evangelical orthodoxies, Texans lived in a rich and diverse religious world. Unorthodox faiths flourished. Rival theologies warred against one another. Politicians and other public figures chastised preachers. Freethinkers filled meeting halls. The vast majority of the population spurned formal affiliations with any religious body. And so religious anxieties festered.

As the nineteenth century closed, the New England aristocrat Henry Adams observed that machinery had supplanted God in the American mind and, in his autobiographical *Education*, famously wondered what it all meant. America was being remade, but in whose image?²³ Religious Texans preceded Adams’ education by decades. The infant murmurs of a New South unsettled the religious mind. Within the churches, Texans spoke the shared language of crisis. Even as their congregations grew and their denominational reach expanded, still they mourned. But then a small group of clerical insurgents emerged with promises of salvation.

²³ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), 379-391.

While many religious Texans succumbed to worry, others used the materials of crisis to build the vehicle for advancement. They preached a new southern ideology, a new southern culture: clericalism—the notion that religious leaders should engage public life and reshape the world in their own image. The apostles of this new clerical culture wrenched southern religion from its intransigent roots and thrust it headlong into the world. They crafted new histories that privileged religion, developed new schemes for public education that emphasized religious principles, and pushed new ideas of government grounded in religious authority. Their expansive new vision changed the way religious Texans made sense of their world, how they identified themselves, how they communicated with one another, what they valued, and what they believed.

The new culture of clericalism reoriented the lives of religious Texans. An aggressive new Christian identity shoved its way to the fore, instilled in its hosts a fighting faith, and shattered the chains of tradition. Preachers found the antidote for all of their anxious wailing. They took the churchless population, the skeptics, the critics, the politicians, the weak-kneed preachers, the indolent congregants, everyone, they took them all and declared war upon their decadent, diseased world.

Clerics innovated weapons of spiritual warfare. The language of “crusades” and “insurgencies” dots the ensuing chapters: this is their language, not mine. The clerical conquest marched to martial music. Its soldiers imagined themselves, indeed believed themselves, to be locked in mortal combat with a vicious malignancy. Clerics’ aggressive willingness to deploy the uncompromising language of warfare won them converts. And it raised the stakes. Their movement depended upon it. Amid the weightlessness of crisis, conflict anchored them. Under the terms of the clerical culture, if Christians weren’t

fighting, Christianity was losing. If the infidels never yielded, then neither could good Christians relent. The clerics lived in a world of walls and towers. Outside lurked dark and mysterious evils conspiring their destruction. Vigilance demanded defense.

Clericalism developed in a world that transcended pulpit and pew. The movement's articulators and organizers worked in a harsh world. When clerics first sallied forth, deep-seated fears and suspicions united their opposition, sank their cause, and discredited their champions.

Elders within the churches castigated the heretical upstarts. Not only fellow preachers, but everyone, farmers and publishers and intellectuals, all stifled the clerics. When the clerics protested, critics mocked them, newspapers pilloried them, and politicians urged adoring crowds to "scourge them back into their pulpits."

But the clerical upstarts resisted the bridle. Recompensed in righteousness, they pressed on. They spoke as angels, as God's holy emissaries, and they refused to unlearn their clerical language. The logic of their nascent worldview reinforced them in defeat. They learned to harness their embattlement for gain. Win or lose, they found everything their crisis-stricken souls hungered for. This was the process whereby private religion penetrated public life. As Senator Morris Sheppard said of his pursuit of moral reform, Texans could be "crowned with the confidence and approbation of Almighty God."²⁴ Could there be a more fulfilling engine of war? The greater their resistance, the more vivid their struggle. The deeper their commitment flowed, the more inevitable victory became.

²⁴ Morris Sheppard, *Congressman Sheppard is for Prohibition* (Fort Worth: Statewide Prohibition Amendment Association Headquarters, 1911), 8.

Scholars, of course, haven't ignored this. Beth Barton Schweiger, Paul Harvey, Ted Ownby, and Gaines Foster have all specifically identified prohibition as a revolutionary moment in southern religion. Ownby called it "the most important effort to enforce evangelical values in the South." Schweiger said it "gauged the distance that postwar congregations and ministers had traveled over the course of the nineteenth century." Foster called the national prohibition amendment the Christian lobby's "crowning achievement" four times in his *Moral Reconstruction*.²⁵ Prohibition undeniably transformed southern religion. Christian activists found what Philip Roth has called "the venerable human dream:" the belief that some single thing can embody all the evil iniquity of the world.²⁶ The implications of that dream reverberate across history. But what lay behind that discovery? What accounts for such a dramatic break with tradition? Gaines Foster's *Moral Reconstruction* made the strongest case for a stark break between an "antebellum moral polity" and a new commitment to government coercion. But what spurred it? What force fractured old traditions and created new ones? Schweiger, reviewing Foster's work, praised his key insights but still wondered, Why? What had changed? "Not even this finely hewn study," Schweiger wrote, "can answer the question of why, in the end, American Protestants felt so keenly that they were losing ground in the late nineteenth century."²⁷ Only a full accounting can begin to answer these questions. To understand just how radical a rupture prohibition truly was, the world of anticlericalism must be taken seriously. It must be explored and reconstructed in full,

²⁵ Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 170; Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 193; and Gaines Foster, *Moral Reconstruction, Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 6, 46, 221, 224.

²⁶ Philip Roth, *The Human Stain* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 307.

²⁷ Beth Barton Schweiger, "How Would Jesus Vote? The Prehistory of the Christian Right," *Reviews in American History* 32 (March, 2004), 49-57.

with its rival clerical culture posed against it. Scholars must reimagine religion in an American South in which its leaders limped rather than reigned. Context matters. There was a world beyond statistics and church councils, and therein the Bible Belt was born. If it can be recaptured, much of the era reveals itself in full.

The triumph of the Bible Belt resounded across the region. The injection of righteousness into the regional social vision transformed how southerners saw the world, and how they saw each other. But for all of the simplicity of the clerics' saints-and-sinners worldview, its logic was never simple. They took a regional culture riven with deeply rooted prejudices and proclaimed one overwhelming, us-and-them division. What would follow? Membership in their moral community increasingly rested only upon political questions and not the seemingly immutable regional barriers of denominationalism, race, ethnicity, class, or gender. Would they align, or would they clash? In fact, they did both. Harmony accelerated established divisions; dissonance upset them.

After decades of political engagement, intractable and oppositional caricatures emerged. Anticlerics defamed the crusaders as Puritans and cranks, and reformers cast their opponents as immoral and debauched. But clerical triumphs tilted the balance. Antiprohibitionists, clerics said, were foreign, they were un-American, they were the embodiment of everything a holy citizenry should struggle against. The fighting prohibitionist, then, represented a holy antithesis, a beacon of manhood, of whiteness, of honor, of godliness—of everything that white religious Texans held dear. The culture of clericalism imbued provincial narrowness with the uncompromising righteousness of a fighting faith. Social divisions deepened.

And yet, rigid social boundaries sometimes buckled beneath the clerical crusade. Clerics were more than race-baiting brutes obsessed with Lost Cause fantasies and rape myths. White evangelicals certainly shared in the racial antipathies typical of their caste and, in their own way, contributed to the region's tragic descent into apartheid. But the culture of clericalism could also flex the inflexible. Clerics' notion of a "better sort" and a "worse sort" sometimes subsumed regional racial and gender divides. Black religious leaders found unexpected pathways to respectability in prohibition, while many working-class whites, clinging to their saloons, found themselves exiled from the clerics' moral universe. Even as they promoted voting restrictions, prohibitionists courted black voters, denounced lynching as the perverted crimes of a whiskey-mad rabble, and even, occasionally, integrated their campaigns.

Small and subtle challenges to the received culture marked the creation of clericalism, but challenges are not triumphs. Instead, in defining a new, "better sort" standard of citizenship, clerics paved their own unique road to prejudice. Clerics, more than anyone else, made the case that their bigotries rested upon choices, not immutable laws. It was because black and Hispanic Texans supported the saloons, they said, that they should be disfranchised. It was because poor whites clung to whiskey, they said, that their votes should be taxed. Clerics veneered division with the appearance of malleability. And they had proof: morality could be measured in votes. Clerics embraced the minority of "better sort" black prohibitionists, for instance, but most blacks and Hispanics opposed prohibition. These were the weak-willed "worse sort," and clerics called for their removal from public life. Clerics invented a merit-based discrimination. In so doing, they invented a form of bigotry for export, one that could thrive in Michigan or Southern California,

one that could live without Jim Crow and could also outlast it. For when segregation fell, morality survived. The issues changed, but the judgments lasted. Moral outlaws, discredited by God, remained targets for a culture war. And so, as southern religion spread, this vision flourished. It was but one of many legacies bequeathed by the Bible Belt.

Americans increasingly lived in the world the clerics made. Religious southerners had created a new and flowering world of fulfilling images, tropes, and arguments. They showed anxious sufferers how to seek salvation. Disenchanted believers learned to find in their moral quests the satisfactions of righteousness. In their political pursuits, they communed with the divine. They *became* the sacred. Sustained by the logic of their convictions, clerics declared unceasing war upon their enemies. They sallied forth into the world and shocked convention. Armed with prohibition, religious partisans broke the long history of political detachment in Texas. Prominent clerics dared challenge traditional anticlerical constraints—and they triumphed. Their uncompromising efforts injected them into public life. Soon their voice was loud, their power manifest. “We have come to the consciousness of our power,” Methodist Bishop Edwin Mouzon wrote in 1913, “and we have just discovered what we can do: We can do anything that ought to be done.”²⁸ This is the history of that discovery.

²⁸ Edwin Mouzon to Clarence Ousley, January 15, 1913, Edwin D. Mouzon Papers, Archives, Center for Methodist Studies at Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

CHAPTER ONE

Heretics, Infidels, and Iconoclasts: The Freewheeling Religious World of the Late-Nineteenth Century

H. L. Mencken once slammed the American South as “a cesspool of Baptists, a miasma of Methodism, snake-charmers, phoney real-estate operators, and syphilitic evangelists.”¹ Historians have read that depiction as another of the critic’s many tirades against the region’s reigning religiosity, but Mencken was also tacitly acknowledging the region’s unregulated religious culture. Far from flat and static, the region’s religious history, as Mencken acidly suggested, brimmed with dynamism, diversity, and discord. Nineteenth-century Texans inhabited a freewheeling religious world of heretics, infidels, and iconoclasts.

The nineteenth century was a time of fracture and fissure, a time when the great tectonic plates of American religion crashed and grated and ruptured religious tradition. Nineteenth-century Texas was no evangelical paradise. There was no homogenous Lone Star religion and no uniform southern religion. Evangelicalism was not a universal, uniform, and unchallenged spiritual creed. Texans and southerners blazed many spiritual and anti-spiritual paths in the late-nineteenth century. Some were winding, some overlapping, some dead-ending. Most were blazed haphazardly and trafficked variously. Some may have led to heaven, some, critics suggested, to hell, and some perhaps to nowhere at all. Texans traveled on dozens of such paths, and many traveled not at all. But

¹ Quoted in Jerry Tompkins, ed., *D-Days at Dayton: Reflections on the Scopes Trial* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 36.

this scattered religious network represented the logic of a freewheeling American religion.

As disestablishment and spiritual democracy bred innovation and diversity, variety, range, and pluralism triumphed. Religious upstarts rejected theological and institutional conformity. Throughout the nineteenth century, their wild theologies sounded what Walt Whitman once called the barbaric American yawp. This was the spiritual world of late-nineteenth-century Texas. Heterodoxy rivaled orthodoxy, diversity stifled uniformity, and a cacophony of competing voices drowned any unified, orthodox hallelujahs. The freewheeling religious world ran rife with infighting and struggle and weakness and anxiety. Within the churches, confusion and contention trampled over harmony and unity. Competition and disagreement ruptured the Baptist, Methodist, and Christian churches, and outside of these denominations, spiritual rebels innovated their own beliefs. They saw visions, spoke with the dead, and communed with the Holy Spirit. Heterodox beliefs nourished heterodox faiths. Meanwhile, skeptics rebelled against all religion. In Texas, freethinkers found fertile ground. Infidel “churches,” speaking halls, magazines, and organizations dotted the state. Others, however, simply shrugged. They stood idly by, indifferent to it all.

The freewheeling religious world stunted the creation of the Bible Belt. Later, the brewing clerical vanguard demanded that the state’s wild religious world be tamed, routinized, and marshaled into a vast, united enterprise of spiritual and moral warfare. The many various spiritual paths would be consolidated and, after decades of struggle, religious activists would unveil a new religious highway, a road running from the earth to the heavens, from a democratic world of spiritual diversity to a narrowly circumscribed

world of politicized evangelical religion, and from a loose aggregate of inward-looking, independent churches to a present reality of political prayer rallies, school board battles, and faith-based presidencies. By understanding and appreciating the depth of the nineteenth century's remarkable diversity and disunity, the rise of the Bible Belt becomes that much more remarkable. For Texans emerging from the Civil War, nothing seemed less likely.

The war wrecked religion in the South. Economic disruptions and demographic dislocations shattered congregations and set religious southerners adrift.² In Texas, the 1860s were a disaster. While the population swelled from a little over 600,000 in 1860 to almost 820,000 in 1870, organized religion actually receded. According to census enumerators, only 843 religious organizations (meeting in 647 churches) served the state. If on any given Sunday every Texan had chosen to attend church, three-quarters of the population could not have found a seat.³ Of course, on the frontier of Anglo settlement, Texas had never been a bastion of organized religion and religious adherence always trailed national averages. "I am afraid the way from Texas to Heaven has never been blazed out," a prominent Texan wrote in 1836.⁴ While religion advanced over the next half-century, even the Methodist divine Homer Thrall called Texas in 1887 an "unoccupied territory" with "children as ignorant of Christianity as though they had been born heathens."⁵ As Thrall recognized, religion struggled.

² Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³ U. S. Census Office, *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850*, Vol. I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1854).; U. S. Census Office, *Eighth Census of the United States: 1860* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864).

⁴ William H. Jack, quoted in Homer Thrall, *History of Methodism in Texas* (Houston: E. H. Cushing, Publisher, 1872), 180.

⁵ *Texas Christian Advocate*, January 27, 1887.

Religious authority requires some measure of religious strength and some basis of spiritual unity. Texas had neither. Simple numbers confirm the state's struggles.

Available data for 1850, 1860, and 1870 suggest stunningly low rates of religious adherence.⁶ Even in 1890, several years into the clerics' aggressive crusade to build new churches and bolster membership rolls, only 30 percent of Texans formally belonged to any religious body.⁷ But numbers tell only half the story; the disunities wrought by the freewheeling religious world tell the rest. Internal conflicts, rejections of orthodox creeds, and resistance toward institutional bureaucracies set the religious world against itself. Factions and dissenters worked at odds. Many fought to wield institutional control; others fought against any such power at all. Cooperation fell before conflict. Internal divisions upset a world of organized religion already struggling to confront the age's secular challenges. Religious heterodoxies only confounded the situation. Religious leaders could barely exercise authority over their wayward members, let alone those spiritual innovators residing outside of the denominations. The cauldron of religion boiled over.

While denominations contended with rivals and struggled to incorporate independent-minded followers, others rejected the denominations altogether. Several unorthodox creeds implanted themselves among that majority of Texans who resisted formal religious affiliations. The mainstream denominations exercised little power over these heterodox faiths. Meanwhile, hostility and apathy leveled their own attacks.

⁶ In 1850, 1860, and 1870, federal census workers enumerated the number of places of worship, the value of church property, and the total seating capacity for religious organizations in each state; they did not enumerate specific data on church membership. Nevertheless, in 1986, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark leveraged mathematical regression models against available data and confirmed the probability of drastically low religious adherence. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, "Turning Pews into People: Estimating Nineteenth Century Church Membership" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 25 (June, 1986), pp. 180-192. See also Rodney Stark, "The Reliability of Historical United States Census Data on Religion" *Sociological Analysis* 53 (Spring, 1992), pp. 91-95.

⁷ U. S. Census Office, *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890*, Vol. IX (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894).

Alongside the various orthodox and heterodox faiths were liberals, agnostics, freethinkers, and atheists. They built sturdy and remarkably impactful organizations across the state and became an undeniable presence in the state's religious landscape. Confronted with such obstacles, religious leaders could hardly have been expected to influence public culture, maintain an "informal establishment," or make anything resembling the Bible Belt.

If many late-nineteenth-century religious Texans pursued public ambitions, internal challenges checked their efforts. While the paucity of organized religion limited the scope of religious authority, three key rivals prevented the emergence of anything approximating a powerful, political faith in the nineteenth century: heretics, infidels, and iconoclasts. Of these roadblocks, some challenged orthodoxies from within religious institutions, some challenged them from afar, and some rejected them altogether. In the context of minimal institutional religious strength, these three groups checked the development of an authoritative religious establishment and prevented the widespread politicization of southern religion. They suppressed the Bible Belt. The freewheeling religious world rewarded diversity, independence, and insularity, rather than conformity, unity, and authority.

Widespread spiritual innovation loomed as one of the three major, internal challenges to the construction of the Bible Belt. Alongside disciplined evangelicalism stood vibrant challenges to religious orthodoxies. "I am amazed to see how many Christians want only novelty in order to recommend a thing to their confidence," the national divine, Thomas DeWitt Talmage, said in his widely printed sermons. He proclaimed the age "full of new plans, new projects, new theories of government, [and]

new theologies.”⁸ Although perhaps the least lasting and impactful of the three obstacles to the clerical triumph, religious dissenters offered the clearest evidence of the nineteenth-century’s boundless religious paths. The strange religion of the famed prohibitionist Carrie Nation best illustrates those wide-ranging possibilities in Texas.

The prohibitionist and celebrity hatcheteer Carrie Nation lived twelve years in Texas. From 1877 to 1889, she breathed the Lone Star State’s freewheeling religious world. It was there she fostered her peculiar brand of Christian faith and, she later wrote, received her visions and her “Baptism of the Holy Ghost.”⁹ Although she won fame for later picking up the hatchet in Kansas, she learned to pick up the Bible in Texas.

Nation’s first husband died of alcoholism in 1869, when Carrie was twenty-two. She remarried in 1874, and shortly thereafter, in 1877, against Carrie’s protests, her new husband David uprooted the family from Missouri and moved to Brazoria County, Texas. Carrie was thirty. The Nations acquired 1,700 acres and plunged into the state’s unforgiving cotton economy. As they struggled with their investment, David tried writing and litigating and Carrie managed a small hotel.¹⁰ Their economic adventures drew them apart and David gradually withdrew from their marriage. Carrie looked to God for help.

Left to tend their failing estate, Carrie Nation despaired. “I began to see how little there was in life,” she would later write.¹¹ Her job managing a hotel freed her from the farm, but still her emotions weighed upon her. In her gloom, she turned to God, to the

⁸ *Texas Siftings*, June 27, 1885.

⁹ Carry A. Nation, *The Use and Need of the Life of Carry A. Nation*, (Topeka, Kan.: F. M. Steves & Sons, 1908), 91.

¹⁰ Nation, *The Use and Need*, 70-74; Fran Grace, *Carry A. Nation: Retelling the Life* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2001), 66.

¹¹ Nation, *The Use and Need*, 74.

“One brigh[t] glow amid the darkness.”¹² In 1880 the Nations moved to Richmond, Texas, where David found work and Carrie operated a new hotel. There, in Richmond, Nation injected herself into the city’s spiritual life. She taught Sunday School courses and joined in organized benevolent work. Neglected by her husband, she devoted herself to the church. “Oh if I can do any good in this life Let me do some good,” she wrote in her diary.¹³ As her marriage disintegrated, religion consumed her thoughts and her writings. Soon she committed herself fully to God. In 1884 a Methodist minister awakened in her a new understanding of her faith, a more keen spiritual presence. She felt “wrapt in ecstasy,” she recalled, and committed herself then and there to Christian service: “From henceforth,” she wrote, “all my time, means and efforts should be given to God.”¹⁴ She joined aid societies, doled out what personal charity she could, and turned her back on all social and physical frivolities. She had been baptized in the spirit, she said, and she had a mission.

Nation’s faith was both vivid and immediate. She *felt* God.¹⁵ “I have had visions and dreams that I know were sent to me by my Heavenly Father to warn or comfort or instruct me,” she wrote. At times she dreamt of snakes, of fires, and of darkness. She dreamed of God as a glowing and comforting light.¹⁶ In 1879 she recorded two such visions in her journal: first, a depressing silent darkness and, some weeks later, a bright

¹² Carry Amelia Nation Diary and Scrapbook, 1870-1900, October 24, 1880, Carry Amelia Nation Papers, 1870-1961, Kansas Historical Society, Kansas Memory, www.kansasmemory.org.

¹³ Nation Diary, August 15, 1879.

¹⁴ Nation, *The Use and Need*, 84. “Mr. Nation,” Carry wrote, “said that up to this year I had been a good wife.”

¹⁵ According to one biographer, she believed in “visions, dreams, and ecstasies.” Grace, *Carry A. Nation*, 80.

¹⁶ Nation, *The Use and Need*, 86, 117.

and rapturous communion with the divine.¹⁷ She later claimed to have foretold a major fire in Richmond and during the brutal drought of 1886 and 1887, she organized a city-wide prayer meeting to plead for rain.¹⁸

Nation dedicated her life to God, but her religious views clashed with orthodoxies. She cast her vivid spirituality against narrow church doctrines. The state's religious sparsity forced Nation, raised in the Campbellite tradition, to join the Methodist and Episcopal churches. But she bristled under their limited theological imagination. Her supernatural beliefs clashed with their staid God. "It is torture to attend the cold, dead service of most of the churches," she later wrote.¹⁹ She rejected orthodoxies and longed for a more vibrant and personal religion. She explored other traditions. She praised certain orthodox Jewish practices and consulted with Catholic priests, but no denomination could satisfy her demands.²⁰

Nation's neighbors began to see her as a fanatic. According to Nation, a local merchant and a Methodist, a Mr. Blakely, confided in her that "Your friends are becoming very uneasy about the state of your mind. You are thinking too much on religious subjects, and they asked me to warn you."²¹ She supposedly replied: "If I have a religion that the world understands, it is not a religion of the Bible." She sought extremes. "I like to go just as far as the farthest," she wrote. "I like my religion like my oysters and

¹⁷ "An event has happened," she wrote on July 24, 1879. "I have had a dream, a vision of the night ... an event of darkness and silence." On August 15, she reported "raptuously [sic] contemplated the goodness of God." Nation Diary. See also Grace, *Carry A. Nation*, 71.

¹⁸ For the fire, see Nation, *The Use and Need*, 87. According to Nation's autobiography, in March, 1889, she received a warning from God of an impending fire and the next day a fire broke out in the city. When it threatened her hotel, a sheriff asked Nation if it was insured. She looked at the sheriff, pointed to the sky, and said it was. Her hotel was spared. Biographer Fran Grace found that Nation's account of the fire clashed with contemporary reports. Grace, *Carry A. Nation*, 84. On praying for rain, see Nation, *The Use and Need*, 94; Grace, *Carry A. Nation*, 85. Years later, Carry claimed it then rained for three days. She called it "nothing short of a miracle."

¹⁹ Nation, *The Use and Need*, 84.

²⁰ Grace, *Carry A. Nation*, 79.

²¹ Nation, *The Use and Need*, 91.

beefsteak—piping hot!”²² In church, she defied religious authorities. She never resisted challenging church elders, even in the middle of services.²³ A Kansas church would later declare her “not sound in the faith”²⁴ and a “disturber of the peace.”²⁵ Her unorthodox beliefs rankled traditionalists. In Richmond, first the Methodist and then the Episcopal church—the only churches in town—banned her from teaching Sunday School.²⁶ Church officials removed her from services when she spoke out, and finally removed her from membership when she claimed to receive visions.²⁷

Local racial and political violence later forced David and Carrie out of Texas. They liquidated the last of their Texas holdings in 1890 and moved north, to Kansas. There Carrie found fame for hatcheting illicit saloons. Although the Nations had left the state’s tumultuous religious world behind, Carrie (now Carry, as in Carry A. Nation) forever clung to her unorthodoxies. When her “hatchetation” drew national attention, and she described herself as “a bulldog running along at the feet of Jesus, barking at what He doesn’t like,”²⁸ Carry was drawing from a freewheeling faith she first cultivated in Texas.

Many others embraced unorthodox faiths. In the 1880s and 1890s, the freewheeling religious world manifested itself most obviously in the Populist’s ground-shaking agrarian insurgency. In his Bancroft Prize-winning *The Populist Vision*, historian Charles Postel discovered a wide-ranging “acceptable heterodoxy” within Texas Populism. Populists, he argued, trafficked in spiritual innovations, embraced modern

²² Quoted in Grace, *Carry A. Nation*, 85.

²³ Nation, *The Use and Need*, 101-2

²⁴ Nation, *The Use and Need*, 100

²⁵ Nation, *The Use and Need*, 102

²⁶ Nation, *The Use and Need*, 84-5. She formed her own interracial, nondenominational Sunday school in her National Hotel and attracted several dozen children. Grace, *Carry A. Nation*, 83.

²⁷ Grace, *Carry A. Nation*, 71.

²⁸ Quoted in Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 24.

beliefs, and rejected traditions. “It would be difficult,” he said, “to define a norm within a spectrum of religious belief that was so diverse, adaptive, and iconoclastic.”²⁹ Within the movement Postel discovered “Free religionists, Christian socialists, agnostics, spiritualists, Theosophists, Swedenborgians, occultists, and mental scientists.”³⁰ Among the movement’s many heterodox believers, Eben Dohoney best captured the diversity of Populist faith.

Ebenezer “Eben” LaFayette Dohoney embodied heterodoxies in all walks of life. Born in Kentucky in 1832, he graduated at the top of his class from Columbia College, took his law degree from the University of Louisville, briefly practiced law, and moved to Paris, Texas, in 1859. He opposed secession but fought for the Confederacy and returned to Texas to become a district attorney, an opponent of Reconstruction, and a two-term state senator. Setting himself apart from his legislative colleagues, during the 1870s Dohoney supported prohibition, women’s suffrage, public education, and the Greenback Party. He established the state’s local option election system as a delegate to the 1876 state constitutional convention and supported statewide prohibition during the disastrous 1887 campaign. A fixture in the state’s public life, he was instrumental in the maturation of the state’s Populist movement and in the formation of the People’s Party in 1891.³¹

Although raised a Cumberland Presbyterian, Dohoney became an elder in the Paris Christian Church as a young man. Before long, however, Dohoney’s penchant for

²⁹ Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 243.

³⁰ Postel, 244.

³¹ S. S. McKay and Doug Johnson, "DOHONEY, EBENEZER LAFAYETTE," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fdo07>), accessed April 08, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

heterodoxy lured him away from conventional religion.³² He indulged in Spiritualism and sympathized with Swedenborgianism, brands of belief that rejected orthodox creeds for the presence of a real and accessible spiritual world. “The paramount issue of the ages is Spiritualism vs. materialism,” Dohoney said. He slammed the “host of materialism headed by the gifted Ingersoll and the majority of the so-called scientists, backed by part of the medical profession, some religionists and a considerable per cent of the common people.” But he rejected the orthodox denominations, too. He praised instead the “well informed Christians, Christian Scientists, Theosophists, and Spiritualists proper, who maintain and demonstrate spirit return.”³³ He posited a living spirit world occupying a sphere between the physical world and the next, and believed that “disembodied spirits have had communication with those in the flesh.”

Spiritualism was not entirely outside of the mainstream.³⁴ The star of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Frances Willard, admired many of its tenants. Eben Dohoney, in fact, communicated with Willard and received correspondence from her in 1899—even though she had died in 1898. She had sent her correspondence through a California medium.³⁵ Dohoney was not alone in believing in such things. Nineteenth-century revivals attracted large numbers of the rural, unchurched population through their spectacle and their spirituality, but they could peddle more than evangelical orthodoxy. In

³² McKay and Johnson, “DOHONEY.”

³³ *Dallas Morning News*, September 15, 1897.

³⁴ See especially R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

³⁵ James D. Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley: The Southern Strategy of Texas Prohibitionists in the 1880s* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003), 1.

Central Texas, for instance, Spiritualists drew large crowds to camp meetings in which working mediums explained the tenets of Spiritualist beliefs.³⁶

In addition to Dohoney, a number of Texans embraced a specific brand of spiritualism developed by the Swedish scientist Emanuel Swedenborg. Albert Francisco worked as a missionary for the state's Swedenborgian New Church. After traveling through Texas, he reported, referring to the state's freewheeling religious world, that "there is a great revolution going on here."³⁷ Several Texans embraced Swedenborgianism. Judge Thomas King of Erath County studied Swedenborg's teachings. Among the state's most respected Populist leaders, gubernatorial candidate Thomas Nugent moved in Swedenborg's direction. Nugent had been raised a Methodist, took an abiding interest in Christian theology, and even studied for the ministry. But several incidents in his life—including religious admonitions against violin playing—led him to turn away from organized belief and toward the spiritualism of Swedenborgianism. Nugent declared himself a "free religionist," "outside of creed or denomination." In an 1893 meeting outside of San Marcos, Nugent publicly rebuked organized Protestantism for imposing a "tyranny of opinion."³⁸ Swedenborgianism, however, offered only one possible path to religious dissenters eager for heterodox faiths. Some turned to alternative traditions. Others, however, still lingered within the denominations, eager to undermine theological and institutional orthodoxy from within.

³⁶ "In Camp: The Day With the Spiritualists at Oak Cliff," *Daily Times Herald*, September 1, 2, 4, and 6, 1896, cited in Charles Postel, "The Populist Context: Texas Cotton Farmers and Religious Conflict, 1880-1900," Agrarian Studies Colloquium, Yale University, January 29, 2010; *Dallas Morning News*, September 15, 1897.

³⁷ Cited in Keith Lynn King, "Religious Dimensions of the Agrarian Protest in Texas, 1870-1908," PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1985, 163.

³⁸ Catherine Nugent, ed., *Life Work of Thomas L. Nugent* (Stephenville, Tex.: C. Nugent, 1896), 161; Postel, 254

The freewheeling religious world perhaps appears most vividly not in the spiritual outliers of that majority of Texans who spurned religious membership, but in the minority that did not. The Baptists and Methodists, the evangelical denominations destined to dominate the state's spiritual life, evidenced all of the era's disorganizational impulses. Internal struggles wracked the denominations with organizational and theological strife. The Baptists and Methodists both struggled to exercise institutional control in a context of widespread factional rivalries and deep-seated theological challenges.

Nineteenth-century Texas Baptists stewed in cauldrons of discontent. Theological diversity, institutional rivalries, and organizational disunity suppressed the power of the denomination. Church historian Leon McBeth depicted Baptist life after Reconstruction as "a jigsaw puzzle with its pieces scattered."³⁹ Unregulated by an empowered state general convention, a unified editorial voice, a stable denominational college, or a common sense of purpose, the denomination limped through the nineteenth century as a loosely confederated alliance of independent churches fractured by rivalries and competing religious visions.⁴⁰ Nineteenth-century Texas Baptist institutions were weak, scattered, and disorganized.

Part of the Baptists' institutional weakness derived from the denomination's longstanding democratic commitments. Baptist theology still stunted professionalization, consolidation, and hierarchy.⁴¹ Individual churches jealously guarded their independence and reveled in their isolation. "There could certainly be no complaint concerning Baptist liberty at this time," Baptist chronicler B. F. Riley wrote, "for it was supreme. Scattered

³⁹ Leon McBeth, *Texas Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History* (Dallas: Baptistway Press, 1998), 65.

⁴⁰ "If Texans had a state religion," *Time* mused in 1947, "it would probably be Baptist." At the end of the nineteenth century, no statement seemed more distant. "Religion: In Texas," *TIME*, November 24, 1947.

⁴¹ See especially Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

over a practically boundless region of country were churches and so-called organizations, hundreds of miles apart, each pursuing its own course, exercising to the fullest its own liberty, and each recognizing itself as equal, if not the superior of every other.”⁴² Baptists treasured autonomy and localism and refused to concede authority to distant denominational bodies. Any promise of combined effort, Riley lamented, was “lost in empty oratory about soul liberty and freedom of conscience.”⁴³ Tradition tugged too strongly on the state’s Baptists. “Nothing short of a marvelous providence,” Riley said, “would extricate so independent a people from a condition so precarious and bind them in to indissoluble oneness. At this time, nothing seemed more remote.”⁴⁴

If localism stunted denominational growth, competition thwarted collective efforts. In the late-nineteenth century, Riley wrote that “men clung sullenly to their views, localities were vehement in their assertion of their respective claims, and none of the disagreement was tempered by gentleness.”⁴⁵ Church historian Joseph Early declared the period a time of “rivalry, anxiety, and distrust.”⁴⁶ Rivalries wracked Texas Baptists. In the nineteenth century, Texas Baptists clashed over theological orthodoxy, institutional loyalty, and denominational boundaries. At points in the nineteenth century, as many as five general conventions, two newspapers, and two universities each vied for the affection of Texas Baptists.⁴⁷ These divisions fractured Baptist life at every level. In 1883

⁴² B. F. Riley, *History of the Baptists of Texas: A Concise Narrative of the Baptist Denomination in Texas, from the Earliest Occupation of the Territory to the Close of the Year 1906* (Dallas: B. F. Riley, 1907), 261.

⁴³ Riley, *History of the Baptists*, 234.

⁴⁴ Riley, *History of the Baptists*, 261-2.

⁴⁵ Riley, *History of the Baptists*, 249.

⁴⁶ Joseph E. Early, *A Texas Baptist Power Struggle: The Hayden Controversy* (Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas Press, 2005), 21.

⁴⁷ Early, vii; McBeth, *Texas Baptists*, 65-6. The organizations were The Baptist State Convention, the Baptist General Association, the East Texas Baptist Convention, the North Texas Missionary Baptist Convention, and the Central Texas Baptist Convention; the Universities were Waco University and Baylor

B. H. Carroll wrote that “district associations have been divided in council; some rent asunder; churches have been torn by faction; brethren alienated and strife engendered.”⁴⁸ Dissension defined the denomination. In the nineteenth century, Baptists did not cooperate; they competed.

The strife-ridden First Baptist Church of Dallas embodied all of the clashing impulses and counterimpulses of the late-nineteenth century religious world. Divided loyalties split the congregation in half. One faction, led by the church’s pastor, James Curry, and the editor of the *Texas Baptist and Herald*, John Link, supported the Baptist State Convention. A rival faction, led by Robert Buckner, editor of the *Texas Baptist*, supported the Baptist General Association. The congregation divided against itself and, in 1878, the festering rivalry finally rent the congregation in two. It seemed all of the Baptists’ denominational rivalries had collided in one Dallas church. Church councils and resolutions failed to quell the divide. The disagreement bled into the public, where letters and gossip reached the city’s newspapers. Buckner slandered the church in his own paper while the church’s official minutes dismissed him as a “cantankerous old fool.” But the old fool had supporters and the rift deepened until Buckner hatched a coup in December 1879—Buckner’s faction claimed to represent the true First Baptist Church.⁴⁹

No association or general body had the authority to settle the matter in Dallas. Buckner tried to take his case to the Baptist General Association, but critics blasted the body for subverting Baptist principles. After a botched trial, John Link warned that BGA

University (in Independence); and the two papers were iterations of the *Texas Baptist and Herald* and *The Baptist Standard*; Riley, *History of the Baptists*, 247.

⁴⁸ Quoted in McBeth, 66.

⁴⁹ Early, 7-11. Riley, 250-1. Buckner’s faction challenged Link’s membership, Buckner claimed that his faction had adhered to church principles and his rivals, by rushing Link’s membership, had not. Therefore, appealing to precedent, Buckner argued that his bloc represented the one true First Baptist Church. He published his claims and fifty-nine members signed their support. For this, Pastor Curry and his supporters purged the would-be usurpers from the church. See Early, *A Texas Baptist Power Struggle*, 7-11.

leaders would “erect the General Association into a judicature higher than a sovereign, independent church,”⁵⁰ and Baptist preacher I. M. Kimbrough said the body “had no right to interfere in the matters of a church, which recognized no higher power than itself to its own troubles.”⁵¹ He was right: the BGA exercised no real authority. Curry retired to Dallas and tended to the remnants of his congregation while Buckner took his exiles and, in May 1880, founded the cross-town rival First Baptist Church at Live Oak Street.⁵²

Several Baptist leaders surveyed the field and lamented the terrible toll wrought by denominational strife. “What a power the Baptists might have been, could their forces have been allied at this time!” B.F. Riley wrote in 1878.⁵³ Throughout the following decade, he wrote, “men, churches, communities, and even entire sections, were taken up with denominational disagreements, and the sacred work lagged, in consequence.”⁵⁴ Even one of the denomination’s leading pugilists, Baylor University President Rufus Burleson, bemoaned denominational infighting. While Burleson marveled at Baptist gains in the state, he wondered what might have been. Late in the nineteenth century, he noted the existence of 300,00 Texas Baptists. “And,” he said, “but for the strife and division especially among preachers, I firmly believe today, there would be 600,000 Baptists in Texas, and a Church in every important neighborhood. When I see how these divisions hinder the cause of Christ and open the wounds of my precious Saviour afresh, I would gladly lie down and die, if it would only bring love and harmony.”⁵⁵ Unfortunately for Burleson, love and harmony were in short supply.

⁵⁰ Early, 20; *Texas Baptist Herald*, March 4, 1880, cited in Early, 19.

⁵¹ *Texas Baptist Herald*, March 4, 1880, cited in Early, 20.

⁵² Early, 12, 21; Riley, 250-1.

⁵³ Riley, 249.

⁵⁴ Riley, 255.

⁵⁵ “An Appeal for Peace & Reconciliation,” undated manuscript, Rufus Columbus Burleson Papers, The Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Burleson feuded publicly with his cross-town rival, B.H. Carroll, the rising denominational titan of Waco's First Baptist. As they quarreled, Burleson found himself compelled to "answer certain charges made against me that I have always 'been mixed up in strife.'" He disclaimed that he wrangled against his Baptist brethren not "for personal honor" but "for the defence of the ordinances, doctrines, and vital interests of my Redeemer's Kingdom." Nevertheless, he called for peace. "I wish to say," he wrote, "that I am now willing to sacrifice any things on earth, except my convictions of truth and duty to restore peace to our beloved bleeding Zion."⁵⁶ He would, in fact, sacrifice much: peace came only when his rivals later purged him from the denominational machinery.

As Baptists threw themselves at one another, denominational rivalries became a zero-sum struggle. Competition crippled denominational efforts as Texas Baptists descended into civil wars. "Thus were arrayed against each other the ablest men of the denomination, each party with its organ and organization," B. F. Riley wrote. "The battle waxed hot from the outset," he reported, and "from the Panhandle to the Gulf, and from the Sabine to the staked plains, Texas was the battleground of contending Baptists." Riley lamented the lost opportunities of an era in which "passion was supreme to judgment."⁵⁷

As denominational factions fought for power, many Baptists rejected the denominational machinery altogether: dissenters refused the denomination-builders and declared their own independent cantons freed from bureaucratic oversight. Entrenched in their church fiefdoms, these scattered pockets resisted centralization. When a denominational establishment began to form in Waco, Samuel Hayden's *Texas Baptist and Herald* pilloried the organizers. He accused J. B. Cranfill of embezzlement, B. H.

⁵⁶ Burleson, "An Appeal," Rufus Columbus Burleson Papers.

⁵⁷ Riley, 219.

Carroll of autocracy, and J. M. Carroll of profiteering. He attacked the champions of consolidation and centralization, accused board members of the newly formed Baptist General Convention of Texas of foisting an episcopal hierarchy upon Texas Baptists, called the Board an episcopacy, and derided the BGCT's partisans as "pontiffs."⁵⁸ He criticized the skyrocketing salaries of the denomination's new professional caste and, spurred by examples of egregious mismanagement, accused various leaders of financial improprieties.⁵⁹ Anxious Baptists rallied around Hayden and his paper and maneuvered to check the rising powerbase in Waco.⁶⁰

"A stormy period had now been reached," B.F. Riley later reflected. Just when Waco leaders seemed to be exerting some modicum of institutional control, critics launched against them. "So far from growing better," Riley wrote, "the situation was growing worse. The Baptists of Texas were not unused to upheavals and stormy distractions, but nothing ever approximated the turbulence of the present."⁶¹ In the face of resistance, the rising denominational powers moved against their critics. J.B. Cranfill and an associate appropriated a rival newspaper, renamed it the *Baptist Standard*, and relocated it to Waco where it parlayed its institutional advantages and journalistic power into an assault against Hayden's *Baptist and Herald*.⁶² For most of the nineteenth century, Texas Baptists had no official general body, no official university, and no official paper. For years, critics and rivalries blocked them. As one concerned Texan wrote in reference to denominational papers, "to have a Baptist newspaper monopoly

⁵⁸ Early, 115.

⁵⁹ Early, 57-62, 65-6, 74-75

⁶⁰ J. B. Cranfill, *Courage and Comfort; or, Sunday Morning Thoughts* (Nashville: The Southwestern Company, 1908), 445.

⁶¹ Riley, 372.

⁶² Early, 51-56; Riley, 15.

would place the denomination constantly at the mercy of one man, who would be pope, boss and supreme dictator at will.”⁶³

It has been an oft-drawn observation of the state’s peculiar religious history that the Baptists drew strength from bedrock institutions: Baylor University, the *Baptist Standard*, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Into the late-nineteenth century, however, two of these institutions did not exist and the remaining two, Baylor and the *Baptist Standard*, competed against rivals and struggled for solvency. One in ten white Baptist churches weren’t even southern Baptists, and the remainder divided in their loyalties and commitments to denominationalism.⁶⁴ These divisions crippled the denomination. Universities struggled with enrollment. Newspapers wrestled with financial stability. All told, these rivalries rocked nineteenth-century Texas Baptists. Even at the congregational level, Baptists fought against one another and exposed the state’s fractured religious communities.

Ultimately, however, clerical champions emerged to tame the Baptists’ disorderly world. The assimilation of rivals under a single banner marked an epochal transformation not only in the denominational history of Texas Baptists, but in the larger effort to achieve the Bible Belt. Under the guidance of leaders such as Benejah Harvey Carroll and J. B. Cranfill, professional religious leaders constructed a vast and powerful religious bureaucracy that they could leverage against their secular opponents. Behind the power of several important pulpits, these leaders transformed Baylor University, *The Baptist*

⁶³ “Dr. Carroll’s Sermons,” undated manuscript, Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Archives, Fort Worth, Texas.

⁶⁴ In 1890, alongside 2,318 Southern Baptist bodies and their 129,734 members, there were 8 Freewill Baptist churches claiming 261 members, 257 Primitive Baptist churches claiming 7,032 members, and 14 bodies of what the Census Bureau called “Other Baptists” claiming 358 members. Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, Vol. IX* “Report on the Statistics of Churches in the United States,” “Statistics of Churches,” 2.

Standard, and the Baptist General Convention of Texas into a powerful religious establishment. These denomination builders breathed the clerical culture and stood with the vanguard of the clerical movement. Their organizational efforts fill many of the following chapters and comprise an important chapter in the story of the construction of the Bible Belt. But their recurring struggles to purge their denomination testified also to the lingering strands of a cacophonous, freewheeling faith.

“Consolidated into formidableness, with wisdom ripened by painful experience,” Riley reported “there was born a sturdy and resistless resolve to rescue the denomination from the disrepute into which it had been dragged against its will.”⁶⁵ Clerics trained their sights upon the spiritual outliers that best embodied the nineteenth-century’s freewheeling religious world. Theological rivalries straddled the nineteenth-century’s bureaucratic battles. Before the Baptist General Convention dominated the state’s denomination, before the *Baptist Standard* monopolized its editorial voice, and before Baylor University dictated its course of study, Baptist commitments to congregational autonomy fostered unorthodox faiths. Matthew Thomas Martin and George Fortune best captured that raucous religious world lurking beneath the denomination’s organizational struggles.

In the 1880s and 1890s, several Baptist preachers challenged theological orthodoxy by adopting a set of beliefs known as “Martinism,” named after Waco Baptist Matthew Thomas Martin of Waco. Martin preached a doctrine of “absolute assurance,” an exaggeration of Baptist beliefs about conversion and the evidence of God’s salvation. Martin believed that any shred of personal doubt convicted an individual’s conversion experience: the converted, assured of their faith, would never doubt their own salvation.

⁶⁵ Riley, 397-8.

Doubt therefore indicted the converted. Martin seduced several followers, including prominent preachers and laymen. “His personality was great,” J. M. Carroll recalled. “Martin himself was an able man, and no ordinary man could have swept so many good men and women off their feet.”⁶⁶ The state’s freewheeling religious world fostered such theological diversions. B.F. Riley slammed Martin’s “freakish diversion from scriptural principles,”⁶⁷ but admitted that, in nineteenth-century Texas, “doctrines as absurd, even, as those of Mr. Martin were destined to gain headway.”⁶⁸

B. H. Carroll, pastor of Waco’s First Baptist, called a church council in 1889 and indicted Martin for heresy. After four conference meetings, officials revoked Martin’s license. In response, the Marlin Baptist Church, thirty miles away, relicensed him and Martin renewed his preaching, “unsettling the faith of not a few,” as Riley observed.⁶⁹ Carroll charged the church with heresy and orchestrated its removal from the Waco Baptist Association. The Baptist General Convention of Texas condemned Martin and resolved that none of his adherents should be seated at regular meetings. The church ignored these declarations and Martin withdrew to Mississippi on his own accord some years later.⁷⁰ Martinism manifested itself intermittently in the years afterward. Among Martin’s followers, Rev. E. R. Carswell cut the tallest figure. “As a preacher,” J. M. Carroll recalled, “he was a remarkably strong man. He was attractive in appearance and rather unusually eloquent.”⁷¹ He carried forth the banner of heterodoxy into the 1890s.⁷² But he was not alone in challenging denominational dogma.

⁶⁶ Carroll, 735-6.

⁶⁷ Riley, 368.

⁶⁸ Riley, 311.

⁶⁹ Riley, 312.

⁷⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, July 19, 1889; Carroll, 735-6.

⁷¹ Carroll, 735.

⁷² Early, 53-54; Riley, 311-312, 368.

George Fortune also challenged Baptist orthodoxies. From 1891 to 1897, Fortune preached a very loose theology from his pulpit at the First Baptist Church of Paris, Texas. He dismissed the doctrine of atonement (the idea that sinners were only reconciled to God through Christ's sacrifice), discounted the idea of Satan, hell, and original sin, and denied the divine inspiration of scripture.⁷³ He converted his congregation. Congregants adored him. They broke all ties with the denomination and declared their support for Fortunism. But an alienated core of church members remained and they challenged Fortune's checkered past and his suspect theology. Meanwhile, the Lamar Baptist Association, of which First Baptist had been a member, wanted their church back. With the findings of the church minority, the association tried Fortune and a committee, led by the denomination's organizational policemen, Rufus Burleson and B. H. Carroll, found him guilty of "a candid, outright, downright, audacious attack on the central, vital doctrines of not only the Baptist faith, but the faith of evangelical Christendom."⁷⁴ In 1895, the Baptist General Convention of Texas condemned Fortune for rejecting the Baptist Articles of Faith and resolved that none of his adherents—or Martin's—would be seated at regular meetings. The convention declared a blanket injunction against the followers of Fortune and Martin and any other heterodox Baptists. Fortune's church ignored these rulings, and Fortune continued to preach in Paris until he withdrew to Oklahoma, on his own accord, in 1897.⁷⁵

These brief but illustrative examples of Baptist diversity testify to both the wide range of possible Baptist beliefs and to the newfound willingness of clerical champions to

⁷³ B.F. Fuller, *History of Texas Baptists* (Louisville, Ky.: Baptist Book Concern, 1900), 398.

⁷⁴ *Minutes of Ex Parte Council Held at the Call of the Minority of the First Baptist Church, Paris, Texas, February 11 & 12, 1896* (Paris: P. H. Bennett, Printer, 1896), cited in Early, 151.

⁷⁵ For Fortunism, see Carroll, 736-8; and Fuller, 398-407.

rein in diversity. But the Baptists were not alone in struggling with theological strife and institutional resistance in an age of bureaucratization and standardization. Heretics and dissenters upset other evangelical denominations as well. Baptists were not alone in struggling to contain theological rebellions and denominational insurgencies. The Methodists struggled with both. Heterodox preachers, including J. K. Street, Leonidas Lantz, and James Dickson Shaw, chafed under Methodism's theological limitations. Others, such as the champions of the Holiness movement, fractured the organized denomination. These two sets of challenges typify the era's embrace of heterodoxy and disunity.

J. K. Street embodied the era's rejection of orthodoxy. In the 1870s and 1880s, Street began to preach a universalist brand of Methodism in Waco. As his thoughts evolved, he moved ever farther away from orthodox Methodist doctrine. "He was mercenary," contemporary Methodist minister Rev. James Mackey said.⁷⁶ Street later spoke openly before J. D. Shaw's freethinking Religious and Benevolent Association and gradually Street's preaching moved fully toward the tenets of universalism before finally savaging Methodist orthodoxy: "He has long been considered beyond its pale," the *Dallas Weekly Herald* declared.⁷⁷ In the summer of 1883, the Methodists' regional quarterly conference expelled Rev. J.K. Street from the ministry and from the membership rolls of his Methodist church. But Street was not alone in challenging Methodist orthodoxy.

A few years later, in 1889, the quarterly meeting of the Waco Methodists expelled Leonidas Lantz from the ministry. Lantz had embraced some of Emmanuel

⁷⁶ *Fort Worth Gazette*, August 1, 1883.

⁷⁷ *Dallas Weekly Herald*, August 30, 1883.

Swedenborg's teachings regarding spiritualism, the trinity, and atonement. He urged a rereading of scripture: "The day will come," he declared, "when Christians, divested of all prejudice, and studying the truth for truth's sake, will drink at the fountain of the word's rich, spiritual meaning and have their souls refreshed and see in its sacred teaching beauty and harmony and grandeur and glory which the letter cannot reveal." The *Dallas Morning News* called Lantz a prominent and influential figure in central Texas. But his heresies rejected Methodist doctrine. He was purged from the ministry and from church membership.⁷⁸ So, too, were others.

James Dickson Shaw became a Methodist minister in 1870. He taught at Marvin College in Waxahachie, Texas, worked on *The Texas Christian Advocate*, and tended several pastorates before taking over the Fifth Street Methodist Church in Waco in 1878. But in his capacity as a Methodist minister, educator, and editor, Shaw drifted from orthodoxy. "A long and critical study of the claims of Christianity has forced me to reconstruct my religious beliefs to some extent, and how far this may go I am not now able to say."⁷⁹ Soon, he rejected all orthodoxy. He questioned the scriptures, atonement, and the divinity of Christ. A September 1882 sermon scandalized congregants with its rejection of basic evangelical doctrines. Visitors to his Waco church described him as an agnostic. In November 1882, the Northwest Methodist Conference met in Cleburne and moved to try him for heresy. Shaw offered a forty-five minute defense of his beliefs, but the Conference decreed his wayward thoughts "detrimental to religion and injurious to the church." Repudiated by the Church, Shaw formed the Religious and Benevolent

⁷⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, October 11, 1889.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Blake W. Barrow, "Freethought in Texas: J.D. Shaw and the Independent Pulpit, M.A. Thesis, Baylor University, 1983.

Association that December, established a monthly paper, the *Independent Pulpit*, and warred against organized religion.

Methodists struggled with dissidents. While the democratic nature of the Baptist denomination produced a pattern of rivalries struggling for power, the relatively ordered nature of the Methodist hierarchy instead dictated several mass departures from the confines of the church. Reflecting the freewheeling religious world of nineteenth-century Texas, the Methodists saw fractures within fractures: holiness advocates within the church castigated separatists, and anti-holiness advocates within the church castigated them. The Holiness movement reflected the Methodists' theological wrangling.

In the years after Reconstruction, holiness preachers first shocked Texas Methodists. Drawing upon John Wesley's doctrine of perfection, and proclaiming a kind of primitive, renewed Methodism, they preached "entire sanctification," the notion that the redeemed could be baptized in the Holy Spirit, purged of carnal sinfulness, and dwell fully in God's love. They preached against all "carnality," against tobacco, ornamentation, and all the popular sins of the world. Holiness doctrines first reached Texas during the 1870s when a core of charismatic preachers rooted their gospel in places such as Corsicana and Ennis. These revivalists brought to several sustained camp meetings their promises of spiritual perfection and, although many spread their doctrines within the confines of the denomination, many quickly lured others away from] orthodoxy.⁸⁰

The "Corsicana Enthusiasts," so-named for a particularly vibrant movement in Central Texas, first introduced faith-healing and tongue-speaking to the state. Some said

⁸⁰ George McCulloch, *History of the Holiness Movement in Texas, and the Fanaticism Which Followed* (Aquilla, Tex.: J. H. Padgett, 1886), 1-4.

they received visions. The staunchest believers claimed that sanctified Christians could not be tempted and could not sin. Moreover, some among the revivalists warned their audiences that hell awaited those stuck within the “Babylon” of organized churches and urged them to come out, that it was their duty as sanctified Christians to exile themselves from the corruption of the churches.⁸¹ The Holiness message soared. Preachers tended to growing crowds. The Free Methodist and self-avowed moderate Holiness minister, George McCulloch, claimed that thousands attended such meetings in Ennis and the surrounding area and that many fled from the old denominations for these newer, purer institutions.⁸² The Northwest Texas Holiness Association was founded in 1883 to shelter these renegade groups.⁸³ Robert Haynes, an erstwhile Presbyterian preaching Holiness in Corsicana and Ennis, was one among those preachers shocking Methodists with Holiness heresies. He laid hands upon the sick, claimed to be the harbinger of a new biblical dispensation, and, claiming total spiritualization and citing scripture, believed himself to have abolished death itself. William Groves claimed to be God’s personal medium and, in revivals at the newly organized Tabernacle Church, would “get under the power,” jerk violently, and, he said, commune directly with God.⁸⁴ He proclaimed a new revelation, a vision of the coming end times. It “sounded like the wild ravings of a heated imagination than the sensible statement of a minister of Jesus Christ,” the critic George McCulloch wrote.⁸⁵ By 1880, the Holiness movement had shaken the state.

⁸¹ Barry W. Hamilton, “The Corsicana Enthusiasts: A Pre-Pentecostal Millennial Sect.” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 39 (Spring 2004), 173-193.

⁸² McCulloch, *History of the Holiness Movement*, 1-6

⁸³ Charles Brougher Jernigan, *Pioneer Days of the Holiness Movement in the Southwest* (Kansas City, MO: Pentecostal Nazarene Publishing House, 1919) 94-6.

⁸⁴ McCulloch, *History of the Holiness Movement*, 19-25.

⁸⁵ McCulloch, *History of the Holiness Movement*, 41-42.

This sudden outbreak of holiness rattled regular Methodists. The moderate Holiness minister George McCulloch lamented that the faith-healers and tongue-speakers had fallen to fanaticism and condemned their “wild, unscriptural doctrines.”⁸⁶ Confronted with wayward doctrines, anxious leaders reacted. The Methodist Northwest Texas Conference ordered its ministers to wage war against the insurgent movement and the denominational paper slammed Holiness as specious and heretical, as a “fungus formation” upon Texas Methodism.⁸⁷ In 1885 a Methodist in East Waco compared the Holiness followers to James Shaw and his freethinking colleagues. Violence eventually manifested itself. Masked men abducted Holiness preacher Robert Haynes on a frigid October night in 1879, threw him into a waiting carriage, and took him to a nearby water tank to be violently dunked until he consented to leave the area.⁸⁸ When William B. Godbey preached holiness doctrines in the 1880s, critics “pelted [him] with rocks, dirt, and eggs.”⁸⁹ Methodism could not tolerate the dissidents and the strains soon split the church. Holiness believers seceded and formed their own independent congregations. Even within the Methodist family, theological and institutional divisions stunted unity. In 1890 alongside 1,076 bodies of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the 409 bodies of the black Methodists denominations, there were in Texas 402 Methodist bodies with loyalties to the Methodist Episcopal Church (the denomination’s northern branch),

⁸⁶ McCulloch, *History of the Holiness Movement*, 27.

⁸⁷ *Texas Christian Advocate*, November 15, 1879; Walter N. Vernon, *Methodism Moves Across North Texas* (Dallas: North Texas Methodist Historical Society, 1967), 144-6; *Texas Christian Advocate* November 15, 1879; Anxious preachers pled for the denomination to “stop this craze” before it engulfed them. *Texas Christian Advocate*, November 29, 1879,

⁸⁸ McCulloch, *History of the Holiness Movement in Texas*, 37-39; Jernigan, *Holiness Movement in the Southwest*, 150-151. McCulloch recalls that Haynes succumbed to exposure on the way to the tank and was taken home before he could be dunked; Jernigan says he was dunked, and the dunking rendered him “unconscious from the dunking and the chill of the cold” and was hurried home.

⁸⁹ William B. Godbey, *Autobiography of W. B. Godbey* (Cincinnati, OH: God’s Revivalist Office, 1909), 353-354, quoted in Barry W. Hamilton, “William Baxter Godbey: Apostle of Holiness.” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36 (Fall 2001), 144-163.

the congregation-centered Methodist Protestants, and Holiness sects that included the Free Methodists and Congregational Methodists.⁹⁰ These divisions crippled Texas Methodism and it was in these turbulent decades that Methodists acceded the Lone Star field to the Baptists.

The freewheeling religious world manifested itself across the state. The name of the denomination hardly mattered: disorganizers and dissenters rejected the mainstream of many churches. The Christian Church (more widely known as the Disciples of Christ), for instance, also fractured. By 1872 disagreements over mission work, denominational organization, biblical interpretation, and proper church practice split congregations in several cities. By 1886 the entire state denomination broke in half. Conservative churches, rebranding themselves the Churches of Christ, indicted extra-congregational organization as unbiblical.⁹¹ They would play no organs and recognize no organization but the independent, local church. The Texas split preceded the national division by two decades.

If the state's fragile denominations' struggled to enforce theological orthodoxy and institutional loyalties, a vast world of freethought and agnosticism existed beyond the boundaries of the denominations. Although seldom integrated into religious histories, they too comprise the history of southern religion. The feuding faithful shared a world with liberals, agnostics, freethinkers, and atheists. If the denominational courts demonstrated the newfound willingness of the evangelical orthodoxy to enforce

⁹⁰ Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, Vol. IX*, 11. Alongside 1,076 Southern Methodist bodies (and 139,347 members) were 346 bodies (and 27,453 members) of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 31 bodies (and 5,536 members) of the Methodist Protestants and 25 bodies (and 1,236 members) of what the Census Bureau called "Other Methodists," which included the Holiness churches of the Free Methodists and Congregational Methodists.

⁹¹ Early, 5-6.

theological conformity, the very real presence of a widespread skepticism testified to the denominations' limited authority. As organized religion reeled in the wake of war, Reconstruction, and disorganization, freethinkers contested Texans' spiritual loyalties. The denominations seemed powerless to resist them. During the final decades of the century, freethinking leaders and organizations drew resources, notoriety, and numbers.

For some Texans, freethought came naturally. Benejah Harvey Carroll, later the state's leading Baptist preacher, described how easily doubt filled his youth. Early in his life he wrestled with infidelity. Although his parents were Christians, and his teachers were Christians, he struggled with skepticism. It seemed natural. "Before I knew what infidelity was, I was an infidel," he later recalled. As a child he questioned church doctrines. He denied the Bible: "I doubted that it was God's book, an inspired revelation or His will to man." He rejected the divinity of Christ. He read the great infidels: Hume, Paine, Rousseau, Voltaire, and others. At seventeen, he joined the Confederacy and, during the war, he rejected his lingering ties to the church and gave himself over to infidelity. Although the end of the war found Carroll embracing evangelical Christianity, the ease in which he had given himself over to infidelity exposed the very real cultural power and appeal of nineteenth-century freethought.⁹²

In contrast to much of the rest of the South, Texas imported many freethinkers from Europe. During the mid-nineteenth century, and especially in the wake of the failed Revolution of 1848, many German intellectuals, liberals, and freethinkers settled Central

⁹² When the war ended, Carroll found himself "utterly poverty-stricken and loaded with debt." He said his infideli philosophies offered no buffer against his emotional pain. "No flowers bloomed and no fruit ripened under their cheerless beams," he said. He yearned for spiritual fulfillment and the fall of 1865 found him at a Methodist camp meeting. There, he accepted a preachers' challenge to try Christianity. What did he have to lose? At the end of the meeting, mulling over the lyrics of a song, he found himself suddenly struck with grace. Then and there, he later testified, he was commissioned to fulfill a holy commission by devoting himself to God's work. B. H. Carroll, "My Infidelity and What Became of It," Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection.

Texas and the Hill Country. Freethinkers populated cities such as Sisterdale, Comfort, and Bettina, formed associations, held regular meetings, and blocked the inroads of religion.⁹³ Churches were slow to develop in many of these areas. Freethinkers blocked churches in Comfort, for instance, until 1892.⁹⁴ Czech immigrants also brought vestiges of European freethought to Texas, although in lesser numbers and with diminished commitments. But imported strands of freethought coexisted with native ones as well. While these immigrant, freethinking citadels persevered, a powerful and parallel freethinking movement captured many native-born Texans. Many prominent Texans rejected organized religion for freethought and religious infidelity. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, freethinkers commanded public attention and tugged at Lone Star loyalties.

Repudiated by the Methodist Church in 1882, the wayward minister James Dickson Shaw quickly established a freethinking stronghold in Waco. The very year of his expulsion, he joined with prominent citizens of Waco to form the Religious and Benevolent Association. Although established as an unorthodox domain “for the worship of God, benevolent and religious works,” the organization fostered freethought and offered a forum for heterodox beliefs. Weekly lectures and discussions scolded organized religion and praised freethought. The association published a monthly magazine, *The Independent Pulpit*, that offered a constructive voice for religious skepticism. It promised to “satisfy the growing demand of our most liberal and independent thinkers on the moral, intellectual, and social questions of the day” and found subscribers all across the

⁹³ Glen E. Lich and Dona B. Reeves, eds., *German Culture in Texas* (Boston: Twayne, 1980). See also Glen E. Lich, *The German Texans* (San Antonio: University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, 1981).

⁹⁴ Allan O. Kownslar, *The European Texans* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 112.

world.⁹⁵ Prominent citizens populated Shaw's freethinking organizations and subscribed to his freethinking paper. Shaw was not an outcast, an eccentric, or a lonely crank. A captain in the Pat Cleburne Camp of Confederate Veterans, he served on Waco's board of aldermen and was instrumental in transitioning municipal government toward a city commission. Doctors, lawyers, judges, and businessmen joined him in probing the boundaries of freethought.⁹⁶ In the freewheeling religious world of the nineteenth century, freethought could compete with organized religion for respectability.

Religious Texans decried Waco's freethinkers. *Gatesville Advance* editor and budding Baptist leader J.B. Cranfill called the Association the "Hell and Damnation Society." He editorialized against the infidels, "castigating, blistering, caricaturing and satirizing Mr. Shaw and his contingents to the very best of my ability."⁹⁷ Waco's First Baptist Church preacher and denominational titan B.H. Carroll savaged Shaw, the organization, and its members in a blistering sermon entitled "The Agnostic."⁹⁸ But despite complaints, the organization grew. In 1884 it built and began meeting in Liberal Hall. The organization peaked in the late-1880s but, reconstituted as the Liberal Society of Texas, continued to draw healthy crowds to lectures on reason, truth, and other freethinking subjects.⁹⁹ But Shaw and his Waco constituents were not alone in championing freethought.

⁹⁵ William Clark Griggs, *Parson Henry Renfro: Free Thinking on the Texas Frontier* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1994), 122

⁹⁶ For Shaw, see especially Barrow, "Freethought in Texas."

⁹⁷ J. B. Cranfill, *Dr. J. B. Cranfill's Chronicle: A Story of Life in Texas* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916), 316.

⁹⁸ Carroll blasted the "infidel tide which pushes its chilling waves over the earth." *Gatesville Advance*, June, 1884, quoted in Postel, "The Populist Context," 14.

⁹⁹ Virginia H. Ming, "RELIGIOUS AND BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ixr01>), accessed April 08, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

Farther north, the Dallas Freethinkers' Association met regularly throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Members gathered in Liberty Hall on South Ervay Street every Sunday night to discuss religion, science, and politics. Attendance, ranging from as little as forty to as many as several hundred individuals, could occasionally rival many of the city's largest Christian congregations. Members included physicians, publishers, and attorneys. Together they hacked away at Christian belief. Through lectures, debates, and discussions, they created their own separate world untouched by the religious sphere.

Although certainly never a dominant faction in the city, the freethinkers' presence still rippled across the religious world. From the moment that "Give-a-Damn Jones" first sensationalized the young city with anti-religious harangues in the early 1880s, Dallas freethinkers challenged religious sensibilities. In one of Texas's fastest growing cities, prominent citizens gathered openly and prominently to denigrate God. They distributed circulars defaming Christian faith. Zion, this was not. The *Dallas News* covered each of their meetings. Monday-morning readers could take in a skeptic's assault against "the 'uncorroborated ghost stories of a very contradictory and unreliable book,'" ¹⁰⁰ or another's charge that "Hell and heaven are the inventions of human leaches called priests and preachers, who live upon the blood they suck from terrified ignorance." ¹⁰¹ When famed revivalists Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey visited the city in 1886, the freethinkers dedicated an entire meeting to revivalism. A physician diagnosed revivalists' "pathological symptoms," a phrenologist linked religious fervor with the "torpid mind,"

¹⁰⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, June 7, 1894.

¹⁰¹ *Dallas Morning News*, March 23, 1891.

and an academic dismissed revivalism as the antiquated survival of a premodern superstition designed only to satisfy individuals' primitive psychological needs.¹⁰²

Newspaper reports reveal the Dallas freethinkers' world. The critics worshipped no god but reason and venerated the skeptic's pantheon: they discussed Voltaire, Jefferson, Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, Carlyle, and others. A portrait of the Great Agnostic, Robert Ingersoll, adorned the hall.¹⁰³ Each year they celebrated Thomas Paine's birthday.¹⁰⁴ Like in Waco, individual meetings of the Freethinkers' Association focused on specific topics that included debunking miracles, championing evolution, and debating the constitution. During one typical meeting, Dr. David Mackay lectured on recent advances in neurology. The brain, he said, presented evidence against the immortal soul. "The bedrock, the zenith and nadir of all philosophy was to be found on the dissecting table," he said. "There alone can man know himself."¹⁰⁵ And yet, privileging free inquiry, they invited guest speakers from various faith traditions. "Jew, Mohammedan, Christian and infidel were equally welcome to have their say," the Association's president declared. The association hosted debates with Protestant ministers and heard from spiritualists, theosophists, Adventists, and Mormons. In 1897 they invited Sahib Abdul Monon to lecture upon "The Superiority of the Religion of the Prophet over that of Christ."¹⁰⁶ Populists, socialists, and women's activists also spoke. The association debated Henry George's Single Tax plan, the Populist platform,¹⁰⁷ and other answers to the era's social crisis. Throughout it all, the freethinkers embraced spectacle and

¹⁰² *Dallas Morning News*, March 8, 1886.

¹⁰³ *Dallas Morning News*, September 26, 1898.

¹⁰⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, January 28, 1895; January 31, 1898.

¹⁰⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, March 23, 1891.

¹⁰⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, November 1, 1897, August 27, 1894.

¹⁰⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, October 24, 1898.

pageantry. They formed “a freethought choir”¹⁰⁸ and a secular Sunday School “to teach virtues and science.”¹⁰⁹ The Dallas freethinkers created a rich and textured world. More importantly, they became a regular presence in the life of the city.

To critics and supporters both, the Dallas freethinkers were a living, breathing force. In the freewheeling religious world of the nineteenth century, they occupied no less secure a station than prominent evangelical leaders. In 1894, for instance, the prolific freethinking American publisher and lecturer Samuel Porter Putnam marveled at the men and women of influence then enrolled in Texas freethinking organizations and said “they are names which represent a great deal of influence in the community, and will do much, no doubt, to shape the destinies of this vast and splendid state towards the principles of republican liberty.”¹¹⁰ To nineteenth-century Texans embroiled in the era’s dynamic religious world, there was little reason to doubt the declaration of one guest speaker, John Leming, when he prophesied in 1897 that “the inevitable overthrow of orthodox creeds and teaching is at hand.”¹¹¹ A leading Galveston real estate agent, merchant, and businessman, George T. Bondies, prophesied “the time to be near at hand when the people of this country will not dare to trust the management of state to any but well proven Atheists, or persons who plan and execute exclusively for the life on this earth on the same principle as one goes to a shoemaker for shoes, to a lawyer for law, and to a priest or preacher for religion.”¹¹² Nineteenth-century Texas society lacked any discernible religious establishment. In the age’s cultural tumult, freethinkers carried some

¹⁰⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, September 19, 1894.

¹⁰⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, September 30, 1895.

¹¹⁰ Samuel Porter Putnam, *400 Years of Freethought* (New York: The Truth-Seeker Company, 1894), 554.

¹¹¹ *Dallas Morning News*, March 1, 1897.

¹¹² *Dallas Morning News*, January 15, 1886; *The Fort Worth Gazette*, April 8, 1891.

measure of influence. Perhaps they knew it: they were not afraid to challenge the state's evangelical churches for cultural supremacy.

In the life of Texas freethought, no figure matches William Cowper Brann for his caustic wit, sheer influence, and inexhaustible capacity for controversy. The son of a Presbyterian minister, Brann made a name for himself writing intelligent, opinionated, and venomous editorials for various newspapers during the 1880s and 1890s. He worked for the St. Louis *Globe Democrat*, served as the editor of the *San Antonio Express*, and helmed the editorial desks of the *Houston Post* and *Waco Daily News*. Then, in February 1895, he launched his own monthly paper, *The Iconoclast*.¹¹³ Brann called it a “periodical of protest.” He opened up against a host of targets but saved the worst for organized religion. Waco's Baptists and the denominational Baylor University became his favorite targets. He decried Baylor as “that great storm-center of misinformation.”¹¹⁴ His attacks attracted great attention. By 1897, *The Iconoclasts'* circulation spanned the globe and peaked at 100,000—five times more than the *Baptist Standard*.¹¹⁵ In fact, in 1890 the state's regular southern Baptists only claimed 130,000 members.¹¹⁶ Brann helped to pioneer the brand of acerbic journalism perfected by H. L. Mencken in the 1920s and added to the diversity of the nineteenth-century religious world. His unrelenting attacks

¹¹³ This was actually the second stint for the *Iconoclast*: He had briefly published his personal paper in Austin in 1891 or 1892 before failing financially. He sold his press to William Sydney Porter—the noted short story writer O. Henry. Charles Carver, *Brann and the Iconoclast* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), 28.

¹¹⁴ *The Iconoclast*, December 1897, quoted in Roger N. Conger, “Waco: Cotton and Culture on the Brazos” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 75 (July, 1971), 60.

¹¹⁵ Cranfill, *Cranfill's Chronicle*, 429,

¹¹⁶ Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, Vol. IX* “Report on the Statistics of Churches in the United States”, “Statistics of Churches,” 159.

against the Baptist establishment became legendary and unleashed a torrent of acrimony—acrimony that resulted in his own death in 1898.¹¹⁷

“We know that frauds and fakes exist, that hypocrites and humbugs abound,” Brann wrote in *The Iconoclast*. “Whether this be due to the pernicious activity of a horned monster or to evil inherent in the human heart, I will not assume to say.” Brann was no detached critic. He was not a free agent or a nihilist in the nineteenth-century religious world. Brann championed a cohesive worldview, the same worldview that drove the state’s freethinking movement and that, in many respects, would challenge and check the emerging clerical movement under the guise of anticlericalism. Brann never believed in a real-life devil but, he said, “We may call that power the devil which is forever at war with truth, is the father of falsehood, whether it be an active personality or only a vicious principle.” Brann declared war upon that devil.¹¹⁸

As Brann twinned his cutting wit with literary flourish and launched against the “hypocrites and humbugs,” he imagined himself soldiering for truth, reason, and rationality. He was not afraid to champion abstract principles such as “honor, patriotism, [and] reverence.”¹¹⁹ Beneath his irony and his vitriol lurked a keen moral and intellectual conscience. “The world has need of iconoclasts as of builders,” Brann wrote, and the world “can in nowise proceed without them.” He therefore enlisted his talents to topple the accumulated myths and superstitions of what he called an “unadulterated imbecility.” “The unsafe building,” he said, “must come down to make place for a better, the old falsehood must be eradicated ere the new truth can take root.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Charles Carver, *Brann and the Iconoclast* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957).

¹¹⁸ William Cowper Brann, *The Complete Works of Brann, The Iconoclast*, Vol. XII, 278.

¹¹⁹ Brann, *Complete Works*, Vol. XII, 278.

¹²⁰ Brann, *Complete Works*, Vol. VIII, 3.

Brann saw Texas Baptists as a major pillar of that “unsafe building.” He saw organized religion as a “rainbow-chaser ... a fellow who mistakes shadows for substance and wanders off the plank turnpike into bogs and briar patches.” Brann sought to purify a world that “no longer produces heaven-inspired men but only some pitiful simulacra thereof.” He despaired that Christians failed to meet his standards. He disdained the “shallow self-seekers” who, he said, “aspire to ride the topmost wave, not of a tempestuous ocean which tries to the heart of oak and the hand of iron, but of some pitiful sectarian mud-puddle or political goose pond.” The forces of organized religion, Brann said, blindly chased their petty, worldly concerns. They were, he said, “following the foolish rainbow of a fatuous utilitaria and getting even deeper into the bogs.”¹²¹ Brann’s criticisms reverberated throughout the freewheeling nineteenth-century religious world. For truth-seekers traveling along innovative and heretical paths, Brann offered an appealing countervision to religious orthodoxy.

But Brann was not the only idol of Texas freethinkers. Texans also knew and admired the nation’s “Great Agnostic,” Robert Ingersoll. A friend to as diverse a cast of nineteenth-century Americans as Frederick Douglass, Walt Whitman, and Eugene Debs, Ingersoll was a force in Republican Party politics and a popular national orator. Ingersoll’s ten-city Texas tour in 1896 drew frenzied followers from farms and towns as far as a hundred miles away.¹²² Ingersoll’s manager mused that he should acquire a four-acre tent to accommodate the crowds. Anna M. Brooks traveled thirty miles by horseback to hear Ingersoll speak in Sherman and relayed her awe at the experience in an effusive

¹²¹ Brann, *Complete Works*, Vol. XII, 278-9.

¹²² Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005), 177-178; *Dallas Morning News*, February 2, 1896.

letter she wrote to the *Truth Seeker*, the nation's leading journal of freethought.¹²³ In northeast Texas, a small community even named their town Ingersoll.¹²⁴ The Dallas Freethinkers' Association praised the agnostic and his works, in which, they said, "every page shines and scintillates with wisdom and truth and beauty that glorify and exalt the reader, so each look at that picture will renew and strengthen our devotion of human thought, the immortal cause he so nobly champions."¹²⁵

The culture of Texas freethought had many figures and many forums from which to draw. Shaw and his *Independent Pulpit*, the Dallas Freethinkers, Brann and his *Iconoclast*, even Robert Ingersoll: freethought was one of many viable alternatives to religious orthodoxy in the Lone Star State's nineteenth-century freewheeling religious world.

Henry Renfro attended Baylor University at Independence in the 1850s, pastored the Independence Baptist Church, led revivals in Cass County, and tended Baptist pulpits in Johnson and Tarrant Counties in the 1870s and 1880s. Although he also farmed, raised stock, and traded land, he threw himself into his religious work. He read and researched. He injected himself into Baptist associational life. In the decades after the Civil War, he became a respected and learned voice among the state's Baptists. He became a respected citizen. When Johnson County dedicated its courthouse, it was Renfro that spoke.¹²⁶ And yet, slowly, he began to drift from orthodoxy. He corresponded with the Waco freethinker J. D. Shaw. Already he was reading several controversial texts, from Spinoza

¹²³ Jacoby, 177-178.

¹²⁴ Cecil Harper, Jr., "REDWATER, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hlr08>), accessed April 08, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

¹²⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, September 26, 1898.

¹²⁶ Griggs, *Parson Henry Renfro*, 118.

to Paine to Ingersoll. Some of these heretical texts began creeping into his sermons. By 1882, rumors spread among state Baptists that Renfro had drifted into infidelity. Many of his congregants suspected him of freethought.

In the fall of 1883, the conference meeting of the Alvarado Baptist Church brought charges against Renfro. Renfro admitted to “doing a little independent thinking,” but he denounced the “religious fanatics” arrayed against him and professed his loyalty to religious faith.¹²⁷ A committee met with Renfro and rescinded its charges. Nevertheless, Renfro did begin to openly denounce religious creeds and champion a works-based faith. Baptists recoiled at this and other offenses. Another church conference met and leveled “the charge of Infidelity in not believing in the inspiration of the Scriptures.”¹²⁸ Renfro admitted to doubting orthodox belief. When presented with a specific passage of scripture, he denied its veracity. On February 2, 1884, Baptist leaders condemned him for “advocating and preaching the doctrine of infidelity” and revoked his certification as a Baptist preacher. According to the church, he was no longer a Baptist. His requests to address the Baptist assembly one last time were denied.¹²⁹

Renfro despaired. The Baptist church, he said, “is a noble church, and I love her still.”¹³⁰

But, as he explained that summer in the *Iconoclast*, his conscience compelled him to dissent. “I have learned this fact,” he said, “that to read is to think, to think is to

¹²⁷ Griggs, 124.

¹²⁸ Griggs, 126.

¹²⁹ Griggs, 123.

¹³⁰ Griggs, 130.

investigate, to investigate is to doubt, and to doubt is to be damned by orthodox churches.”¹³¹

Exile liberated Renfro. “I am free,” he said, “and can express my sentiments untrammelled. I must confess that this consideration is somewhat refreshing, as I had felt so long that my utterances had rendered me obnoxious to the church.”¹³² He spread a new gospel of freethought. “The time will come,” he said, “when men will be controlled less and less by blind faith, and follow more and more the lamp of reason.” He expressed his preference for a “religion of deed rather than the religion of creed.”¹³³ He lectured to large crowds in Alvarado. His first meeting, the *Alvarado Bulletin* reported, drew “perhaps the largest audience ever assembled at the opera house.”¹³⁴ Citizens wrote in to the *Bulletin* to praise him. J. D. Shaw congratulated him in the pages of his *Independent Pulpit*. “Who will be the next to come from under the galling yoke?” he asked.¹³⁵ In the freewheeling religious world of the nineteenth-century, it could have seemingly been anyone.

Riven by divisions and rejections and ungoverned by orthodoxy, religion in Texas registered little public authority and held little hope for political influence. The birth of clericalism would struggle against internal restraints: the churches were too poorly populated and outfitted to house an impactful movement. Heretics, infidels, and iconoclasts besieged the clerical upstarts. And yet, even those few figures able to leverage their religious power in pursuit of public authority found themselves restricted

¹³¹ *Independent Pulpit* 2 (May 1884), 34.

¹³² Griggs, 131.

¹³³ Griggs, 134.

¹³⁴ Griggs, 135

¹³⁵ Griggs, 136.

by an anticlerical public culture wary of religious partisanship. Obstacles to the Bible Belt lay in the disunity of the religious world and in the hostility of the secular.

CHAPTER TWO

Subduing the Saintly: The Anticlerical Tradition

It was amid the frenzy of the freewheeling religious world that Senator Richard Coke told several thousand adoring Texans in Waco to “scourge” political preachers back to their pulpits.¹ According to a now vast historiography on southern religion, a sitting southern senator, two decades after the birth and death of the Confederacy, should never have said anything like this. The Bible Belt had its “beginnings” and its “origins” nearly a century earlier; evangelical revivals had long since burned over much of the country; a proslavery Christianity bolstered the region’s antebellum social order; ministers nudged the region toward secession; preachers bolstered Confederate nationalism; and religious leaders fashioned a new southern civil religion to deal with defeat and “redeem” the region. They had already seemingly captured the South.² During the Civil War, as Drew Faust put it, “in a region where evangelical commitment was at once widespread and, the authority of the clergy at least rivaled that of the new Confederate state,” Christianity provided “the most fundamental source of legitimation for the Confederacy.”³ There are so many other positive instances of religious influence in southern historiography that it

¹ *Galveston Daily News*, August 30, 1885; *The Dallas Weekly Herald*, September 3, 1885.

² John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Bible Belt* (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1996); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); Charles Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (1993; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1980).

³ Faust, *Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 22-23.

becomes nearly inconceivable to think of the South as anything but a hive of buzzing evangelicals moving the regional culture according to its whims. And yet, in 1885, in the capital of the state's Baptist establishment, in the shadow of what would become the nation's largest denominational college, addressing the state's most prominent religious leaders, Senator Coke could flay many of the clergy—and *profit* from it. And he was not alone.

Anticlericalism—opposition to the interference or influence of religion, churches, or clergy in public affairs—evokes images of revolutionary France or Mexico, if it evokes anything at all. It recalls priests and Catholics: vestiges of the Old World and its old order and its old problems. The word fails to stir up relevant images for the United States, let alone that supposed den of religious fervor known as the Bible Belt. But perhaps it should.

In 1908, Henry Watterson, the noted editor of Kentucky's *Louisville Courier-Journal*, one-term Democratic Congressman, and Pulitzer Prize-winning author, rebuked the era's surging political Christianity. "Holding the ministry in reverence as spiritual advisers, rejecting them as emissaries of temporal power," he said, "I do not intend, if I can help it, to be compelled to accept a rule of modern clericalism, which, if it could have its bent and sway, would revive for us the priest ridden systems of the Middle Ages."⁴ Religion, politics, history: the clerical crusade forced partisans as well as opponents to grapple with them all. But Watterson spoke for the reigning worldview of the late-nineteenth-century South: Most Southerners spoke an anticlerical idiom. They believed that American freedom was exceptional, that the nation's political liberties were fragile, and that patriotism demanded they be zealously guarded against the scheming relics of a

⁴ *The Fort Worth Telegram*, January 10, 1908; *Dallas Morning News*, January 8, 1908.

brutish and unenlightened Old World past of kings and priests. During the late-nineteenth century, prior to the making of the Bible Belt, these anticlerical ideas reigned supreme.

Anticlericalism, it must be remembered, is not synonymous with irreligion nor is it incompatible with religiosity. Although a practical concession to many of the restraints imposed by the freewheeling religious world, southern evangelicals nevertheless embraced anticlericalism. Some prominent scholars, such as Rhys Isaac and Nathaniel Hatch, promoted its foundational role in the rise of American evangelicalism. Anticlericalism, they argued, fostered a democratic faith unburdened by hierarchy or concentrated power. American evangelicals, especially in the South, preached an individualistic and otherworldly religion averse to contentious public issues. For such men and women, the next world trumped the here and now. Anticlericalism can be seen as the embodiment and enforcement of that otherworldly commitment.⁵ Anticlerical southerners delegitimized a whole range of clerical activity and effectively blocked clerical transgressions with great walls of condemnation. Much of that condemnation even arose from within the denominations themselves.

Protestant Texans committed themselves to saving souls, not the world. One of the state's earliest Methodist leaders, Homer Thrall, worked to stimulate, he said, the "the great work of diffusing through our entire population the savor of the knowledge of Christ." As a scholar he wrote of providence and souls, not politics and societies.⁶ Thrall was an evangelical of the old school. The problem of his generation was not in the public sphere or in schools or government, he said, but in souls. And when he found deserts in

⁵ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) 145-147, 155-157, 181-3; Nathan O. Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 44-46, 170-179.

⁶ Homer Thrall, *History of Methodism in Texas* (Houston: E. H. Cushing, Publisher, 1872), 5.

an otherwise lush religious landscape, when he tried to account for the scarcity of organized religion in the late-nineteenth century, he didn't blame radicals, liberal theologians, or saloons. He looked inward. "Oh," he lamented, "if every minister and layman had attained the full measure of personal piety, and exhibited the active zeal, of genuine missionaries, how many more precious souls might have been brought to Christ!"⁷ Although twentieth-century Baptist leader George Truett breathed an odd mixture of clerical and anticlerical beliefs, he nevertheless illuminated many strands of the evangelical's spiritual faith. "The land-mark that most of all needs resetting in our American churches," he said in 1911, "is the predominant passion to save lost souls, and any church out of which has gone that passion is going on the rocks, and any church out of which has gone that passion is but a grinning, ghastly skeleton of a church; and any preacher out of whose preaching has gone that passion is no longer an evangelical preacher, preach whatever he may and however eloquently he will."⁸

Some nascent fundamentalists aligned their rigid theologies with the region's reigning anticlericalism. Cyrus Scofield, whose *Scofield Reference Bible* sold millions and popularized premillennial dispensationalism (the theology underlying much of twentieth-century Christian fundamentalism), tended Dallas's First Congregationalist Church. His conservative theology oriented faith away from public life. "The true mission of the church," he said, "is not the reformation of society." He despised moral reformers. "What Christ did not do, the Apostles did not do. Not one of them was a

⁷ Thrall, *History of Methodism*, 5.

⁸ George W. Truett, "The Coming of the Kingdom in America," in The Baptist World Alliance, *Second Congress, Philadelphia, June 19-25, 1911: Record of Proceedings* (Philadelphia, Pa., Harper & Brother Company, for the Philadelphia Committee, 1911), 421-429..

reformer.”⁹ His brand of fundamentalist faith, however, would be transformed in the twentieth century by competing fundamentalist leaders such as J. Frank Norris, who would neatly align his theology with the emerging clerical movement. But the story of anticlericalism transcends the vagaries of hard-line theologies.

There was always a practical and political side to religious anticlericalism—many anticlerical clergy proved that particular issues, and not broad principles or deeply held convictions, could determine views on clergy and politics. The Populist insurgency of the 1880s and 1890s proved this. Conservative clergy used anticlericalism to bludgeon the agrarian upstarts. Although prominent populists included the erstwhile circuit rider “Stump” Ashby and other former evangelical preachers, and several preachers from the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) published prominent religious justifications for the movement, conservative clergy laid into the movement.¹⁰ One newspaper editor chastised Uriah Browder, a Christian pastor, for running for congress: “When a preacher quits preaching the gospel and goes to dabbling in politics, he is entirely out of his place.”¹¹ The great southern revivalist, Sam Jones, in one of his barnstorming tours through Texas, upbraided both Populists and Democrats: “Here I am trying to save Texas souls and you [are] going around in politics.”¹² Jones’ later championing of prohibition cast doubts upon the sincerity of his anticlericalism. And yet, whatever the underlying motivation, anticlericalism sapped religious activism in the late-nineteenth century South.

⁹ Cyrus I. Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy* (New York, Arno C. Gaebelein, n.d.), 26, quoted in Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 298.

¹⁰ For religion and Populists, see Joe Creech, *Righteous Indignation: Religion and the Populist Revolution* (Urbana, Ill. : University of Illinois Press, 2006); Keith Lynn King, “Religious Dimensions of the Agrarian Protest in Texas, 1870-1908,” PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1985; and Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹¹ *McKinney Democrat*, July 26, 1894, quoted in Gregg Cantrell, *The People’s Revolt: Populism in Texas* (forthcoming, Yale University Press).

¹² *Dallas Morning News*, October 7, 1894

While scorn ripped Populist preachers, temperance reformers attracted their own anticlerical critics.

The religious brand of anticlericalism forced early temperance reformers to renounce political ambition. When the United Friends of Temperance traveled the South after the war, they emphasized the personal, voluntary aspect of their creed, explicitly condemned political meddling, and renounced all prohibition legislation.¹³ Well into the 1880s, even after the dawning of a robust clerical movement, many preachers still refused to support moral reform. Content to operate within traditional evangelical limits, they saw prohibition and other issues as dangerous diversions and a serious impediment to their spiritual mission.

Amid the 1880s prohibition campaigns, the Lone Star evangelist Collin McKinley Wilmeth decried the shifting nature of the state's evangelicalism. He warned that prohibition agitation "endangers spiritual life" and he preached against the prohibition campaigns of 1885 and 1887 "with the hope that it may assist to check the tide which is now carrying so many preachers into politics and virtually out of the pulpit."¹⁴ Likewise, John C. S. Baird, a veteran Methodist preacher, sensed a radical break with traditional southern Methodist practice. "For thirty-one years," he wrote, "unmixed devotion of heart and life have I lavished upon the M. E. Church South, and the consuming flame has been constantly fanned by the thought that non-interference in State politics is one of the primary laws of her being." For Baird, the lure of politics and other worldly cares loomed ominously. Citing scripture, he warned that "as members and ministers of the church of

¹³ *New York Times*, May 3, 1873.

¹⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, October 24, 1886.

the Son of God, we are to remember that ‘the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God.’”¹⁵

Baptist J.B. Cranfill, editor of the *Baptist Standard*, fanned many anticlerical suspicions when he ran as the vice-presidential candidate of the national Prohibition Party in 1892. Many of his fellow ministers rebuked him. The editor of the *Mississippi Baptist Record*, for instance, condemned his Texas colleague: “We are opposed to the preachers condescending to be politicians,” he wrote, “and have never seen one who ever did any good as a preacher, in any shape or form, who took such a step.” The editor needled Cranfill and the *Standard’s* readers. “The Texas brethren have our sympathy,” he said, “if it is true that one of their papers is to be run by such a man.”¹⁶ Cranfill fervently assured his subscribers that his political involvement in no way compromised his faith or his ability to edit a religious newspaper. Some, Cranfill wrote, “have feared that we would run this paper [the *Standard*] as a partisan religio-political journal. On this point we desire to say, once for all, that the STANDARD is not a political paper. It does not expect to be. It is a Baptist paper and a religious paper. This is its aim and destiny, and our friends need have no fears that it will ever descend to the profession of politics.”¹⁷ But indeed, many did fear.

Such anticlerical sentiments crippled early reform efforts. When some ministers became increasingly eager to flaunt cultural barriers and a clerical consensus developed around at least a limited form of political engagement, anticlerical critics savaged the movement. When B. H. Carroll’s and other clerical leaders sallied forth to fight the prohibition battles of the 1880s, they would do so without the strength or unity of the

¹⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, October 16, 1885; October 16, 1885. Baird cites 2 Corinthians 10:4.

¹⁶ Quoted in *Baptist Standard*, March 31, 1892.

¹⁷ *Baptist Standard*, March 31, 1892.

state's evangelicals. Internal weaknesses crippled the formation of an effective clerical movement. Religious anticlericalism, at least for a time, prevented it.

If anticlericalism lingered within the churches, it reigned in public life. "We have retired the gods from politics," the American infidel, Robert Ingersoll, triumphantly declared on Independence Day, 1876.¹⁸ Two years later, the Supreme Court tried to do just that. It ruled in *Reynolds v. United States* (1878) that Thomas Jefferson's depiction of the First Amendment as a "wall of separation" was "almost an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the [first] amendment."¹⁹ Nationwide, religious activism seemed exhausted. The triumph of abolition and the ordeal of Reconstruction sapped millennial energies in the north. Wartime disruptions and anticlerical tradition blunted the Bible Belt. Courts overturned religious legislation. Freethinkers achieved an unprecedented visibility. Across the country, religion suddenly seemed absent from public life. The post-Reconstruction period remains one of the dark periods of what Jon Butler called the "Jack-in-the-Box Faith" of American historiography. Caught between the drama of the Civil War and the emergence of such notable crusades as the Social Gospel, prohibition, and fundamentalism, religion seemed suddenly to have disappeared.

While nineteenth-century Texans never licensed a political faith, they hardly expressed an unqualified affection for preachers, either. Texas Folklorist James Ward Lee recognized a widespread hostility toward many ministers: "The reasons for the lack of trust are almost too many to name," he said. "Clergymen have a long history of doing no physical labor but eating high on the hog ... Some have allowed themselves to become sanctimonious, some have meddled outside their proper spheres, and some have been

¹⁸ Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005), 1.

¹⁹ *Reynolds v. United States*, 98. U.S. 145 (1878).

caught out in flagrant misconduct.”²⁰ In Texas, preachers were hardly unimpeachable. In the early-nineteenth century, the Methodist Homer Thrall recalled, hooligans dunked ministers in rivers, squawked chickens during services, and smoked out church services by lighting smoke fires below the floorboards.²¹

Culture, tradition, and history all impeded the formation of an assertive Christianity in the Lone Star State. So did law. Anticlericalism expressed itself in a rich legal tradition. Until a Reconstruction government rewrote the state constitution, Texas joined most of the rest of the South in constitutionally barring ministers from holding political office.²² No idle clause, elected ministers were in fact removed from the state legislature.²³ “However unclerical it may be for ministers to seek political preferment,” Homer Thrall wrote later, “it is manifestly unjust to proscribe them like common felons.”²⁴ But for many years, Texans regarded “political preachers” as just that: illegitimate, corrupt, and criminal.

Public life strangled clerical religion. In the schools, clergy struggled to stress Christian values. The state constitution of 1876 barred public school funds from “the

²⁰ James Ward Lee, *Texas, My Texas* (Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas Press, 1993), 80

²¹ Homer Thrall, *History of Methodism*, 49, 51, 180.

²² See chapter six. Over the course of the nineteenth century, thirteen American states constitutionally forbid clergy from holding political office. Of the thirteen, only Delaware and New York were not in the South or the Border South. Of the eleven Confederate states, only Alabama, Arkansas, and Florida elected not to exile their clergy from government. The rest chose to lump ministers with duelists and perjurers—and African American males and all women—as classes unfit for political office. Thomas Jefferson advocated such limits in his 1783 draft of the constitution of Virginia and later reflected that “Even in 1783 we doubted the stability of our recent measures for reducing them [the clergy] to the footing of other useful callings.”²² Tennessee and Maryland maintained the exclusions until 1978. William Silverman, “The Exclusion of Clergy from Political Office in American States: An Oddity in Church-State Relations,” *Sociology of Religion*, 2 (Summer 2000), 223-230.

²³ Daniel Parker, an anti-missionary Baptist leader, was elected to the Congress of the Republic of Texas and took his seat on November 11. He was removed by November 14. The House Committee of Privileges and Elections unanimously ruled that Parker “is a minister of the gospel, and as such is not entitled to a seat in this house.” See Dan B. Wimberly, “Daniel Parker: Pioneer Preacher and Political Leader” (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1995), 244.

²⁴ Homer Thrall, *History of Methodism in Texas*, 27.

support of any sectarian school” and the State Board of Education interpreted that clause broadly. Any teacher who led students in prayer or Bible reading, the Board ruled in 1881, forfeited their access to state funds.²⁵ For the next twenty-seven years, the state of Texas blocked school prayer.²⁶ Long before it made waves in the twenty-first century for pushing anti-evolution and pro-Christian textbook standards in science and history, the state’s Board of Education blocked some measure of religious influence from the schools. Only in the twentieth century, behind the full force of a maturing clerical movement, could religious leaders transform the relationship between religion and education. In 1926, H. L. Mencken’s *American Mercury* would report that “in the Bible Belt, school and church are one and inseparable.”²⁷ In the nineteenth century, evangelical Texans buckled under the weight of a popular anticlericalism.

Texas governor Oran Roberts adhered to anticlerical notions of church and state and carefully avoided enacting any measures that could blur their rigid separation. In late 1881, for instance, as President Garfield lay reeling from an assassin’s bullet, Roberts refused to declare a public day of prayer and thanksgiving for his recovery. “It is all right to fast and pray,” he said. “I don’t object, but I do not see the necessity for the governor of a state directing its religious concerns.”²⁸ According to most nineteenth-century Texans, political liberty depended upon a strict and total separation of church and state. Roberts denied even the influence of religious *principles* on government and believed that faith should not in any way shape his state’s politics. According to Roberts, religion

²⁵ *Texas Christian Advocate*, July 16, 1881; *The Dallas Weekly Herald*, July 28, 1881.

²⁶ In 1908, on the heels of the clerical triumph, the state supreme court ruled in *Church v. Bullock*, 109 S.W. 115 (Tex. 1908) that schools could lead students in readings from the Bible and recitations of the Lord’s Prayer. These were judged to not be sectarian, but to be essential supports for moral development.

²⁷ William Seagle, “The Moral Law,” *American Mercury*, December, 1926, 451.

²⁸ *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, September 8, 1881.

had no legitimate role—direct or indirect—in public life.²⁹ He called for no prayers. (Garfield died soon thereafter).

Roberts merits notice not because he was sensational or exceptional, but because he was typical. His attitudes and opinions sparked little uproar among Texans. Religious leaders never slammed a war against Christianity or complained about public slights. Roberts' anticlericalism matched the tenor of the late-nineteenth century's freewheeling religious world. "It has taken a large and more arduous battle to divide the church from the state than it did to achieve our national independence," he confidently declared. He and many others feared undermining that separation. The "union of church and state is all wrong," he said. Even to slightly tiptoe over the church-state wall could threaten the security of the American experiment.³⁰

Although much has been made of southern churches' efforts to push secession, bolster Confederate nationalism, and ameliorate postbellum anxieties, memories of the Civil War infected political Christianity with images of fanatical abolitionists and religious zealots. Oran Roberts refused to issue thanksgiving declarations because he reserved that kind of religious entanglement for northern fanatics. Like many, his attacks harkened back to the War. In the South's anticlerical memory, it was the North, and not the South, that had pursued a Christian republic and been misguided in its fanatical pursuit of religious ends. "The religious principle of New England and Ohio makes their politics," Roberts said. "We have seen plenty of that in the war, and it is this unconscious, subtle union of the church and state in the public mind that shows to the front in days of

²⁹ *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, September 8, 1881.

³⁰ *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, September 8, 1881.

thanksgiving and fasts of solemn prayer.”³¹ In the southern mind, political preachers had pushed antislavery agitation and sparked the war that killed several hundred-thousand southerners.³² In the aftermath, clerical innovators bore this burdensome association. The image of the fanatical North burdened southern clerics.

“The triumph of the evangelical sects also naturally involved the establishment of the Puritan ideal,” southern critic W. J. Cash wrote in his 1941 *Mind of the South*. In “the Methodist prairies of the Middle West” and the “Baptist backwaters of the South,” H. L. Mencken wrote in the 1920s, “Puritanism survives, not merely as a system of theology, but also as a way of life. It colors every human activity.”³³ The South as a den of Puritanism became a common trope, and yet nineteenth-century southerners recalled Puritans, Cotton Mather, and “blue laws” with fear and trepidation. The Puritans preyed on the region’s religious imagination. If the label meant something specific in Cash’s time, it meant something entirely different to earlier generations of southerners. The most influential Texas preacher of the late-nineteenth century, Baptist Benejah Harvey Carroll, lamented the malevolent hold of the Puritans over the South’s historical memory. He knew that if he politicked for moral issues, his anticlerical opponents would unleash an onslaught. From them would “come the croaking: Blue light, blue light, Mayflower, Mayflower, crank, crank, fanatic . . . clergy, clergy, clergy.”³⁴ The fear of religious

³¹ *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, September 8, 1881.

³² See Robert T. Handy, “Protestant Theological Tensions and Political Styles in the Progressive Period,” in [“In part because of the defense of slavery that had explicitly ...]. *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, edited by Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 239. For a typical representation of this argument, see “The Parson in Politics,” *The Macon Telegraph and Messenger*, April 24, 1883.

³³ H. L. Mencken, *Prejudices: Fifth Series* (New York: Knopf, 1926), 253.

³⁴ *Galveston Daily News*, August 20, 1885, quoted in James D. Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley: The Southern Strategy of Texas Prohibitionists in the 1880s* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003), 39. See also Joseph Locke, “Conquering Salem: The Triumph of the Christian Vision in Turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century Texas,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 114 (January, 2012), 232-257.

passions infected religious activism. In the 1880s, State Senator J. O. Terrell pointed to the annual report of the superintendent of the State Lunatic Asylum. “Look to page 19,” he said, and “you there find that there are twenty-three persons confined in our asylum made crazy by religious excitement.”³⁵ Before prohibitionist preachers slammed alcohol for making men insane, anticlerical leaders indicted religious fanaticism for the same.

The freewheeling religious world remained a thorn in the side of the political preachers. Freethinkers used their platform to blast religious politics as the barbaric sigh of civilization’s primitive past. The Dallas Freethinkers Association slammed religious politicking. In 1894 the organization’s president, Dr. G. S. Lincoln, said that religion “cannot properly enter into public affairs” and likely spoke for many when he declared “I will vote for any man no matter what his faith may be if he believes in keeping his religion out of public affairs.”³⁶ Dallas freethinkers declared against tax exemptions, government chaplains, public support of religious schools and charities, oaths, the use of the Bible in public schools, and Sabbath laws. They demanded “that all laws looking to the enforcement of ‘Christian’ morality shall be abrogated.” They promoted a political system “founded and administered on a purely secular basis” and committed themselves to “whatever changes shall prove necessary to this end.”³⁷ Lincoln’s successor, Ormond Paget, similarly declared “that we object to the church in politics, and to the preacher who sues his pulpit for the spread of political tents that are subversive of our rights as citizens.”³⁸

³⁵ J. O. Terrell, “Speech of Senator Terrell on the Importation, Manufacture and Sale of Alcoholic Liquors within the State,” 6, The Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

³⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, June 25, 1894.

³⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, May 10, 1894.

³⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, July 19, 1897.

In Waco, William Cowper Brann's *Iconoclast* leveled his caustic, unrelenting attacks against clerical machinations. Eager to attack the state's clergy, anticlerical fury raged across its pages. As the clerical movement matured, Brann never missed an opportunity to denigrate the "fashionable politico-religiosity of Texas." He wrote "there are ministers occupying prominent Texas pulpits who would not recognize the Incarnate Son of God if they met him in the road." Moral reformers, he said, made a mockery of thinking men everywhere. "He [the moral reformer] needs only to become a prohibitionist—not necessarily a teetotaler—cultivate a sanctified whine calculated to curdle milk, grab the crank of some pitiful little gospel mill and begin to grind." Brann's merciless attacks contributed to his later demise, but during most of the nineteenth century he captured the sentiments of a great number of anticlerical southerners.³⁹

The prominent Galveston real estate agent, merchant, and businessman, George T. Bondies, put the matter plainly: "The issue between church and state is clean-cut and as irreconcilable as life and death. There is no use to mince matters. To the votaries of the church, the things appertaining to the eternal life are necessarily so overwhelmingly more important than the things solely appertaining to the present life, that they cannot hesitate for a moment in contemptuously subordinating the latter to the former." A non-believer, he freely embraced the "atheist" label and in the 1890s attacked moral legislation and called for the dismantling of all existing Sunday laws. If the state could bar Sunday activities, could it mandate others? What about church attendance? he asked. "There is no

³⁹ Willam Cowper Brann, *The Writings of W. C. Brann, Volume One* (Waco: Herz Brothers, 1911), 169. See also Charles Carver, *Brann and the Iconoclast* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957).

stopping place for this sort of thing,” he said. “Hence the separation of church and state must be stern and distinct, as otherwise it will inevitably lead to ... a foul despotism.”⁴⁰

Together, religious and secular anticlericalism stifled the development of a potent clerical culture. Texas politicians acted swiftly to quell clerical incursions. When Dallas pastors petitioned the city council in 1895 to close saloons on Sundays, one alderman, Patrick O’Keefe, objected. “A scowl of disapproval drove every sunbeam from Mr. O’Keefe’s countenance,” the *Dallas Morning News* reported. “I am opposed to any crowd of preachers meddling in state matters,” he said, “Churches have their duty to perform without monkeying with government.” He urged the council to remain vigilant. “The time is coming, gentleman of the council, when this is going to be dangerous.” Preachers demanded too much, he said. “After awhile it will get so we can’t do anything without asking the preachers ... it will get so after a while that a plumber can’t fix a joint without asking a preacher.” The Sunday closing petition was defeated, ten-to-two.⁴¹

Texans worked to blunt moral passions at the national level, as well. In 1888 and 1889, New Hampshire Senator Henry Blair proposed a national Sunday law outlawing all nonessential Sunday secular work and a constitutional amendment mandating public education cultivate “virtue, morality and the principles of the Christian religion.”⁴² Workers from the National Religious Liberty Association spoke in Dallas and warned citizens of the dangers lurking behind such legislation. The passage of such measures, they said, “is in fact trying to establish the christian [*sic*] religion in this country by embodying its principles in the fundamental law.” Such legislation, if passed, “would

⁴⁰ *Fort Worth Gazette*, April 8, 1891. Bondie married the daughter of Baylor University president William Carey Crane. She later sued for divorce, citing Bondie’s religious infidelity. *Dallas Morning News* January 15, 1886.

⁴¹ *Dallas Morning News*; December 4, 1895.

⁴² *Dallas Morning News*; February 12, 1889; *Dallas Morning News*, September 6, 1889.

have been nothing less than a union of church and state,” they said. “That we and our fellow citizens may enjoy the inestimable blessings of both religious and civil liberty,” the two proclaimed, “we also believe it to be our duty to use every lawful and honorable means to prevent religious legislation by the civil government.”⁴³ Nearly 500 Dallasites signed a petition against the amendment.⁴⁴

Into this furnace stepped the nascent clerical movement. In the early 1870s, Baptist Benejah Harvey Carroll introduced several temperance resolutions to Waco’s First Baptist. They sparked “agitation and discussion” among church members, but Carroll steered them through church committees and won their unanimous approval during a general church meeting. The resolutions declared church members “alarmed for the cause of Christ, for ourselves, and for the rising generation.” Citing scripture, members pledged themselves to “the cause of our blessed Redeemer” by personally abstaining from any and all “intoxicating liquors.”⁴⁵ The resolutions reverberated among Texas Baptists. Although the heated prohibition campaigns of the following decade rendered these modest personal pledges innocuous, they ruffled the conservative feathers of religious Texans. Carroll praised his congregation in the denominational press, but critics inveighed against him. H.W. Stanton of Grapevine blasted Carroll. “How dare I, as a faithful watchman upon the ‘tower of Zion,’ seeing the ‘sword of destruction coming,’ keep my mouth shut and fail to ‘give the people warning,’” he wrote. Stanton accused Carroll of straying from the church’s holy mission and called his actions “anti-scriptural

⁴³ *Dallas Morning News*, September 6, 1889.

⁴⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, February 12, 1889.

⁴⁵ “Temperance Resolutions of the First Baptist Church of Waco, TX.” December, 1873. Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection, Archives, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

and detrimental to the cause of Christ.”⁴⁶ Carroll was single-handedly shepherding his followers along a new and uncharted path. He would have to navigate the internal anticlericalism of the churches and the hostile anticlericalism of a secular world. But if any religious leader could confront these obstacles, it was Carroll.

By the 1880s, Carroll towered over the religious life of Texas. Baptist contemporaries widely regarded him as their state’s greatest orator, scholar, bureaucrat, and theological policeman. Pastoring the state’s flagship church, Waco’s First Baptist, would already have wielded him enormous influence, but Carroll pursued all of the avenues available to a popular preacher. He published numerous histories and theologies, threw himself into denominational work, and even helped found Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He pioneered the clerics’ taste for denomination building. All the while, his weekly sermons outclassed his colleagues. The state’s dueling denominational papers outbid themselves for the rights to republish them. To hear a Carroll sermon was, by all reports, an unforgettable experience. Commentators always began with Carroll’s physical description. At six-feet four-inches tall, and weighing over 260 pounds, with a long flowing white beard, he cut the image of an Old Testament prophet. Together with spellbinding oratory and a magnetic personality, Carroll enthralled audiences. His star was rising. In 1878, the Southern Baptist Convention bestowed a high honor: Carroll delivered the official convention sermon. It was a hit. The awe-struck convention appointed him to speak at every subsequent convention, provided he attended.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ H. W. Stanton, “A Criticism of the Waco Baptist Church,” (clipping, n.d.), Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection.

⁴⁷ See Alan J. Lefever, *Fighting the Good Fight: The Life and Work of Benajah Harvey Carroll* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1994).

Carroll loomed over the region. In 1883, the Southern Baptist Convention held its annual meeting at Carroll's First Baptist. Carroll had become, as his brother would later fawn, "the Colossus of Baptist History."⁴⁸ Armed with enormous influence, Carroll began leveraging some of his power in the public sphere. Carroll bristled against longstanding anticlerical constraints and urged religious leaders to extend their reach beyond the pulpit. His preaching evinced a desire for worldly involvement that later generations of activists would return to for inspiration. Meanwhile, as a longtime temperance advocate, Carroll emerged as a leading light of the state's growing prohibition movement.⁴⁹

"It was in 1885 that the opening gun for prohibition in Texas was fired," Carroll's brother, James, later recalled.⁵⁰ That year B. H. Carroll and other McLennan County prohibitionists organized a local option election: a county-wide referendum on the manufacture and sale of alcohol. No figure loomed larger in the state's early history of prohibition and none was better positioned to feel firsthand the frustrations of clerical aspirations. It had been decades since the introduction of temperance into the churches of Texas, but prohibition was new and anticlericalism was entrenched. Carroll's cause was destined to fail. The vicious McLennan County campaign of 1885 revealed the full power of a vicious anticlerical tradition.⁵¹

In vain, Carroll and the McLennan County prohibitionists tried to highlight the moral urgency of the liquor question. In a pattern that would become commonplace, anti-prohibitionists, or wets, turned the election into a referendum on the proper role of clergy

⁴⁸ J. M. Carroll, *Dr. B.H. Carroll, the Colossus of Baptist History: Pastor, First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas and First President of S.W.B.T. Seminary* (Fort Worth, Tex.: J W Crowder, 1946).

⁴⁹ Lefever, *Fighting the Good Fight*.

⁵⁰ J. M. Carroll, *A History of Texas Baptists: Comprising a Detailed Account of their Activities, their Progress, and their Achievements* (Dallas: Baptist Standard Publishing Company, 1923), 915.

⁵¹ For the 1885 contest, see especially James Ivy's brief but informative *No Saloon in the Valley: The Southern Strategy of Texas Prohibitionists in the 1880s* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003), 25-45.

in secular affairs. Though generally included under the umbrella of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century reform, prohibition always evinced an overwhelmingly religious nature. One opponent said “it is plainly obvious that the Christian element, inspired by the preachers, furnish the fanaticism of the movement.”⁵² Many budding clerics proudly played their part. In August of 1885, Baptist leader J. B. Cranfill traveled to Crawford to debate the merits of prohibition with United States Representative Roger Q. Mills. Enthralled by the evening’s intensity, Cranfill reveled in the experience. “The house was packed to suffocation,” he later recalled, and “there was no standing room anywhere.” The Baptist challenger gleefully imagined himself as David, “with right and God on his side.” And, at least according to Cranfill’s account, he, like the Hebrew king, slew the giant. In his telling, he caught the congressman in glaring inconsistencies and won the crowd. Thirty years later, he still called it “the greatest single achievement of its kind in my entire career.” Cranfill taught school, edited several newspapers (including the prominent *Texas Baptist Standard*), superintended Baptist mission work, ran as Vice President for the national Prohibition Party, published several books, and served on the boards of numerous universities—but debating, and perhaps defeating, the popular antiprohibitionist congressman trumped them all. Cranfill believed he had won, and he loved that he had won. But his individual success mattered little: such overt clerical activism only bolstered anticlerical resistance.

Anticlericalism crippled the prohibitionists.⁵³ United States Senator Richard Coke, the former Redeemer-governor of Texas (who, the notorious freethinker J. D.

⁵² J. D. Shaw, “The Local Option Contest,” *Independent Pulpit* 3: (September 1885), 79.

⁵³ J. D. Shaw, “The Local Option Contest,” *Independent Pulpit* 3 (September 1885), 79.

Shaw assured his readers, was an “infidel”⁵⁴), entered the fray and joined with other prominent Texans laying into the preachers. Here he famously spewed upon the ministry in the speech that the Waco *Daily Examiner* said would “make ecclesiastical fur fly.”⁵⁵ Coke exhorted his followers to restrain a runaway faith by taking measures into their own hands and urged his listeners to “scourge” the preachers.⁵⁶ Other iterations had Coke urging the crowd to “scourge the preachers back and stop their rations.” As preachers mobilized in later years, they exploited Coke’s harsh words to great effect. For the time, however, Coke devastated the clerics. But he was not alone.

“Senator Coke is by no means original in cherishing or uttering such sentiments,” the Waco *Daily-Examiner* reported.⁵⁷ The popular press slammed the prohibitionist movement. “The News maintains that political preachers are a nuisance,” read the *Galveston News*.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, freethinkers blasted the campaign. The freethinking liberal and fallen Methodist preacher J. D. Shaw published his iconoclastic *Independent Pulpit* in Waco. He too castigated political preachers. “The church is a dangerous factor in politics,” Shaw wrote in his lengthy editorials. Others focused on Carroll. By highlighting his role as an activist minister, rather than the merits of local prohibition, opponents stifled the campaign. John Elgin, a surveyor and lawyer, charged that Carroll “had desecrated the Sabbath, set apart by God and the laws of Texas as a day of devotion, by using it to make a stump speech and fire the partisan heart,” and that “he had betrayed the traditions of a church that made it its boast that it had always fought the union of

⁵⁴ J. D. Shaw, “Senator Coke and the Liberals” *Independent Pulpit* 3 (February 1886), 139.

⁵⁵ B. H. Carroll, *Prohibition: Dr. B. H. Carroll's Reply to Senator Coke* (Austin, Tex.: J. B. Link, 1887?), n.p.

⁵⁶ *Dallas Weekly Herald*, September 3, 1885.

⁵⁷ *The Waco Daily Examiner*, October 02, 1885

⁵⁸ *Texas Siftings*, November 21, 1885.

church and state.” Religious activists faced a cruel paradox: The harder they worked, the more devastating the anticlerical reaction. Religious leaders struggled for a solution and found none.

Carroll and his religious allies were constantly on the defensive, forced to concede that “to the question, is it proper for a minister of the gospel to engage publicly in political discussions, I answer no.” Carroll pled only that his opponents be “moderate, dispassionate, and fair.”⁵⁹ They would not be. “As is usual when the Lord and his people take part in political campaigns,” J. D. Shaw wrote, noting the rancor and dissension sowed by the campaign, “the contest has been a bitter one.”⁶⁰ Carroll noted that “union of Church and State float like specters through his [the anti-prohibitionists’] mind’s horizon.” He recognized that the weight of history already indicted clerical politicking. Opponents easily trafficked in hostile imagery, such as the Salem witch trials and the Inquisition, that delegitimized the prohibitionists. Chapter six further explores the power of such images and the struggles to overcome them. But in the 1880s, Carroll and his allies stood prone, exposed to a repressive cultural tradition. He vainly tried to repel “the hue and cry about Church and State” with appeals to a broad and noble Baptist history ranging “from Christ until now,” but his defense failed to assuage anticlerical fears. Articulating a new brand of history would prove a much larger task. Without it, the clerics were exposed.

In a sermon delivered the night before the election, B. H. Carroll decried the scorn and reproach leveled against the clergy. Carroll, the backbone of the movement, was perplexed. He and his allies had entered the battle fighting against sin and immorality and

⁵⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, August 26, 1885; August 30, 1885; August 20, 1885.

⁶⁰ J. D. Shaw, “The Local Option Contest,” *Independent Pulpit* 3: (September 1885), 79.

all the corrupting influences of the saloon. And yet they, not the saloon owners or the brewers, were the ones eviscerated by public opinion. In an open letter, Carroll expounded upon Isaiah 5:20: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.” Carroll declared himself “a watchman on the tower, now nineteen years,” and said “fidelity to a sacred trust has made it my duty, as a watchman, to sound the trumpet and warn the people.” And yet *he* was reproached. Carroll maintained that he expected to be denounced. “I knew well what speech would cost,” he said, and “knew that it would make me a target for the archers.” But, he said, the burden of the clerical impulse weighed too heavily upon him. “Shall I be silent?” he asked, “Or shall I lift up the voice, cry aloud and spare not?” He decided he would not be silent. And, he said, he “has been on the firing line since.” Carroll and his brethren, as he claimed to foresee, were indeed the target for the archers. And their aim was true. McLennan County remained wet.⁶¹

In 1885, the antiprohibitionists succeeded because the election turned on popular prejudices against meddling religious leaders. In Carroll’s view, evil was called good, and good evil. Paraphrasing Twain, he said the antiprohibitionist “pulls out of that Magician’s drawer another package of labels. He unrolls them, he sticks them all over Prohibition. Presto! What a change! They read: ‘Puritanism, Bigotry, Union of Church and State, Fanaticism, Republicanism, Anti-Democratic, Don’t Prohibit, Taxation, Intemperance and Woman’s Suffrage. Prohibition no longer seems Prohibition, light seems darkness and evil seems good.’”⁶²

⁶¹ Carroll, *Prohibition: Dr. B. H. Carroll's Reply*, n.p.

⁶² Carroll, *Prohibition: Dr. B. H. Carroll's Reply*, n.p.

Only by convincing Texans to believe otherwise, clerics later concluded, would their sacred cause reign triumphant. It was a lesson they were slow to learn. In 1887, they blundered their way through another disastrous campaign.

Despite their crushing McLennan County defeat, the prohibitionist clergy and their allies trudged onward. They successfully lobbied the state legislature to submit a prohibition amendment to the Texas electorate in August 1887. The Texas constitution requires frequent amendments. By the twenty-first century, well over 600 had been proposed and over 400 had been approved by voters. Perhaps legislators in 1887 considered a prohibition amendment just one among many, or perhaps they had been deaf to the uproar in Waco. In either case, no legislators seemed to expect the fury to follow. Few had given the issue a second thought. J. B. Cranfill, the Baptist editor who spoke in the amendment's defense, recalled that this initial "fight was neither a long one nor a hard one."⁶³ Once the amendment was submitted, however, the state erupted.

The 1887 campaign became, in Cranfill's words, "the hottest and most eventful political campaign ever up to that time fought in Texas."⁶⁴ The secular press agreed. "The people of Texas have never been so stirred up by a political contest," *The Dallas Morning News* reported, and "the preachers and churches have never been so active and excited." Passions were unleashed across the state. The *News* found "preachers and politicians howling and singing, swearing and preaching until the whole State has become a bedlam."⁶⁵ The campaign locked religious activists and anticlerical opponents into brutal

⁶³ J. B. Cranfill, *Dr. J. B. Cranfill's Chronicle: A Story of Life in Texas* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916), 341.

⁶⁴ Cranfill, *Cranfill's Chronicle*, 341.

⁶⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, July 22, 1887.

conflict, but anticlericalism again stifled clerical partisans and exposed the limits of political religion in the nineteenth-century South.⁶⁶

The vanguard of Texas clericalism mobilized to support the amendment. In March, the Prohibition Amendment State Convention opened the campaign in Waco. J. B. Cranfill, the young Baptist editor and rising denominational star, stood in awe of the assembled leaders. “There were giants in those days,” he recalled. The titanic B. H. Carroll, the great Texas Baptist leader, was then, Cranfill wrote, “in the zenith of his power” and lent his denominational clout to the campaign.⁶⁷ But Carroll, the wounded leader of the Waco debacle, hesitated to repeat the mistakes of 1885. He had learned the consequences of naked religious activism. “Let the preacher in his duty & privilege as a citizen ... attempt to make a speech in favor of prohibition,” he wrote in his personal notebook, “and he is called a ‘political parson,’ ‘fanatic’ ‘long-haired’ And the cry is raised – ‘Scourge him back’ [*sic*].”⁶⁸ When delegates chose Carroll to chair the campaign committee, the cleric proposed a new, secular strategy.

Attempting to compensate for the McLennan County debacle, reformers constructed a secular façade to conceal their religious roots. The political preacher was still too poisonous a figure and they feared the inevitable anticlerical backlash. Carroll told the Convention that “the preachers will take a back seat” during the campaign and “men of standing and ability who are members of the secular professions” would assume

⁶⁶ In his *The Path to a Modern South*, Walter Buenger argued that “The 1887 prohibition election badly needs study, and, despite the turmoil it created, is not even mentioned in the best textbook history of Texas.” Walter L. Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2001). No study of religion and public life can repeat such a mistake. For the 1887 contest, see especially Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics, 1876-1906* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1971), 85-93; and Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley*, 45-103.

⁶⁷ Cranfill, *Dr. J. B. Cranfill's Chronicle*, 343.

⁶⁸ B. H. Carroll, Personal Notebook of BH Carroll, Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection.

leadership instead.⁶⁹ In 1885, the clergy had been lambs to the slaughter, innocent reformers waylaid by an unsuspected anticlerical ambush. Carroll and his clerical allies had misjudged the prevailing winds of the late-nineteenth century: Texans still generally dreaded the idea of wrangling, worldly preachers. The oft-deployed phrase, “political preacher,” instantly evoked a host of fears and suspicions and the mere hint of their existence induced aggressive reactions. Senator Richard Coke’s suggestion to “scourge them back” had been melodramatic, but the message resonated. Anticlerical fears were embedded within regional culture. So deeply, in fact, that the prohibitionists’ secular strategy could not pacify an already aroused anticlericalism.

Religious leaders, of course, did not simply withdraw. Several threw themselves into the campaign. Owing to his perceived successes in 1885, J. B. Cranfill debated several prominent antiprohibitionists in crowded meeting halls.⁷⁰ Carroll, of course, spoke often in defense of the amendment. Religious publications such as the *Texas Christian Advocate* and *Texas Baptist and Herald* inveighed against the liquor traffic weekly. Many pulpits thundered against the evils of alcohol and churches remained, as they always would, the strongest base of antiliquor sentiment. Nevertheless, the campaign reflected less of its religious roots than any effort before or since. Religious leaders spoke defensively and denied political aspirations. They did everything possible to downplay any appearances of partisanship. Still it was not enough.

Even the reformers’ muted campaign succumbed to popular anticlericalism. The scandal of political religion engulfed the state and the anticlerical multitudes charged ministers with political and spiritual heresy. State Senator J. O. Terrell said the “wave of

⁶⁹ Quoted in Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley*, 47-48.

⁷⁰ Cranfill, *Dr. J. B. Cranfill’s Chronicle*, 347.

excitement ... comes to us impelled by the efforts of ministers of the Gospel and temperance lecturers.” Prefacing his case with declarations of admiration for “the truly pious minister,” Terrell laid into the clerics. “I bow before them as spiritual guides,” he said, “but can not accept their guidance in temporal matters.”⁷¹ Waco’s freethinkers said much the same. While conceding the right of preachers as citizens, J. D. Shaw wrote that “the thing we object to is the obvious desire and intention of many preachers to subordinate our political institutions to the domination of the church.”⁷² He scorned the politicking preachers as “zealous, noisy, and acrimonious.” He called them short-sighted, cloistered in sanctimony, and out of touch with the anticlerical tenor of the times. “While many people are willing to tolerate their pretensions to divine sanctity, attend and endure their sermons, now and then, and bear the expenses of the gospel,” Shaw wrote, “they are by no means ready to entrust them with the political destinies of this country.”⁷³ These sentiments were not confined to a freethinking minority.

Congressman and future-Senator Roger Q. Mills again fought against prohibition and again accused Carroll and his followers of apostasy: prohibition, he charged, was “brought in the bosoms of a Protestant political priesthood.”⁷⁴ He quoted Jefferson, railed against religious intolerance, and told the preachers to climb back into their pulpits. He called the whole campaign a fraud: “It is wrapped in the liberty of Heaven, but it comes to serve the devil. ... It comes to tear down liberty and build up fanaticism, hypocrisy and intolerance.”⁷⁵ In one notable incident, Mills condemned Carroll’s meddling and said

⁷¹ Terrell, “Speech of Senator Terrell,” 6.

⁷² J. D. Shaw, “The Prohibition Campaign,” *Independent Pulpit* 5 (September 1887), 163.

⁷³ Shaw, “The Prohibition Campaign,” 163.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley*, 54.

⁷⁵ Roger Q. Mills, *Speech of the Hon. R. Q. Mills before the United Anti-Prohibition clubs of Corsicana, Saturday, May 21, 1887* (Corsicana, Tex.: Corsicana Daily Courier, May 1887), 24.

“hell was so full of such preachers that their legs were sticking out of the windows.”⁷⁶

Mills was not alone. Congressman John Hancock decried a “meddlesome and intolerant priesthood.”⁷⁷ In San Antonio, crowds interrupted a prohibition rally by pelting Methodist Rev. A. H. Sutherland with eggs.⁷⁸ The city’s mayor reportedly slapped a prohibitionist clergyman across the face.⁷⁹ Even the aging Confederate leader Jefferson Davis came out against the Texas amendment, saying “The world had long suffered from the oppressions of government under the pretext of ruling by divine right.”⁸⁰ The balance combined against the clerics. “No means were left unemployed by the forces arrayed against the cause,” a Baptist chronicler later recalled.⁸¹

In addition to berating preachers in public, antiprohibitionists organized. In May, a group of antiprohibitionists, or “True Blues,” gathered in Dallas to coordinate their efforts. *The Dallas Morning News* reported large crowds that included the “leading minds of Texas.” They overflowed the Dallas opera house. Whites and blacks comingled and listened to speechmakers pontificate on liberty and fanaticism. Of the many speakers, Congressman Mills raised a particular hue and cry. He “touched off the big gun,” the *News* reported. In his two-and-a-half-hour speech, he discussed liberty and self-government, blasted prohibition, and slammed political preaching. Some in the audience said he went too far. Others, not enough.

⁷⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, October 28, 1892. See also Macum Phelan, *The Expansion of Methodism in Texas* (Dallas: Mathis, Van Ort & Company, 1937), 268.

⁷⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, May 21, 1887.

⁷⁸ Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley*, 74.

⁷⁹ B. F. Riley, *History of the Baptists of Texas: A Concise Narrative of the Baptist Denomination in Texas, from the Earliest Occupation of the Territory to the Close of the Year 1906* (Dallas: B. F. Riley, 1907), 308.

⁸⁰ Davis to Lubbock, July 20, 1887, in William J. Cooper, ed., *Jefferson Davis: The Essential Writings* (New York: Random House, 2004), 435.

⁸¹ Riley, *History of the Baptists of Texas*, 308.

Mills noted that it was the centennial of the U.S. constitution. He urged his listeners to train their ears and listen to the founders. “They studied the history of all the ancient nations,” he said, and learned from their mistakes. “When our fathers founded this government,” he said, “they had the experience that this history of all the past afforded.” But now prohibitionists threatened to hurl American civilization back through time and reverse the American miracle, he claimed, “now the Legislature has submitted to us a proposition not in keeping with our history or compatible with freedom, but dictated by the priesthood of this State.” He asked the convention if they wanted to give away the American experiment, “to go back to the worn-out policy that dominated the governments of old, under which the people were governed and the human family was oppressed.” Texans could vote, he said, and decide “whether we shall cross our hands as spaniels and slaves under the dictation of these men.” Few Texans then trafficked in notions of a “Christian nation.” Mills channeled instead the dominant anticlerical conception of American history. “Our fathers suffered and bled for liberty,” he said. He didn’t ask the convention to shed blood. He asked that they vote against prohibition and political religion.⁸² They did.

Anticlerical attacks and the prohibitionists’ own crippling self-consciousness led to a political fiasco.⁸³ On August 4, 1887, Texas voters turned out in stunning numbers to spare the saloon and rebuke the preachers.⁸⁴ When the final returns were tallied, prohibition received less than 130,000 of the nearly 350,000 votes cast.⁸⁵ Shaw’s

⁸² *Dallas Morning News*; May 5, 1887.

⁸³ Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley*, 45-87.

⁸⁴ Roughly sixty-six percent of the electorate voted in the general election of 1886. In the special prohibition election the following year, with no candidates on the ballot, seventy-two percent of eligible voters turned out. Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley*, 92.

⁸⁵ Barr, *From Reconstruction to Reform*, 88-92.

Independent Pulpit gloated. “How must the patriotic prohibitionist have felt,” Shaw wrote, “when he realized that four thousand political preachers were using him in a wild effort to place the principles of personal liberty in the hands of a Theocratic despotism?” The iconoclastic paper judged the result a great rebuke against “the fanatical religio-political element” and credited the devastating defeat to anticlerical reaction against an overreaching religious fanaticism. “These experiments,” Shaw wrote, “amounted to nothing beyond exciting popular indignation and disgust at such anti-Southern, not to say anti-American, conduct.” Underneath the hyperbole, Shaw, the freethinker, captured the sentiments of the state better than any leading clergymen. Despite the prohibitionists’ best efforts, clerical maneuvering overshadowed the merits of the liquor question and doomed the campaign.⁸⁶

Despite successfully scourging the clerics from the public stage, many pondered the future. “When the election is over and the result is known,” the *Dallas Morning News* had asked that summer, “what effect will it have upon the country?”⁸⁷ Some wondered if the clerics could be permanently suppressed. “A taste for conflict has been imparted, and those who in religious orders and in professional politics have developed this appetite will be expected to furnish the necessary pabulum,” the *News* concluded. Religious leaders “have started a new political warfare and it must have its course.”⁸⁸

Although he gleefully celebrated the clerical debacles, the freethinker J. D. Shaw surveyed the future with foreboding. He interpreted the outbreak of clericalism as an omen. When Democrat Grover Cleveland recaptured the presidency in 1888, Shaw, like others, noted that national political parties split mostly over tiring sectional loyalties, not

⁸⁶ J. D. Shaw, “The Prohibition Campaign,” *Independent Pulpit* 5 (September 1887), 163.

⁸⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, July 22, 1887.

⁸⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, July 22, 1887.

substantive policy differences. But it would not last, he said, for the old generations were passing and new dividing lines were being drawn. Doubting the ability of a bubbling progressivism to reorient politics toward the question of trusts and concentrated economic power, he predicted instead a new divisive politics of morality. “The election is now over and the excitement incident thereto has passed away,” Shaw wrote, “therefore we deem it a proper time to point out some indications of a coming conflict that will put a heavier strain upon our constitution and the government than any that has ever existed in the past.” He told his readers to look to the previous prohibition campaign for evidence of the looming struggle: “The conflict—inevitable, we believe—between Church and State, or between clerical authority and civil liberty.” Shaw predicted a clerical insurgency. “The orthodox churches,” he wrote, “led by their priests and preachers, will be on one side, and the true American citizens, led by the lovers of freedom and equal rights, will be on the other.” The lifeless divisions of national life would be redrawn and invigorated. The stakes would be raised and the battle fought. Religious warfare would consume the nation.⁸⁹

Just as the Scopes Trial would a generation later, in the 1880s one sensational issue pitted the sacred against the secular, galvanized the public, and stunned the godly with a humiliating public rebuke. Wedded to one cause, religious leaders gambled on prohibition and lost big. They staked their reputations and their credibility and received nothing but condemnation. All momentum evaporated. The “prohibition wave had spent its force,” J. B. Cranfill later lamented. Once confident warriors laid down their weapons and retired. Once loud, they were, Cranfill said, “now pensively silent.” The chastised movement nearly perished. Subscribers to the prohibitionist *The Advance* diminished

⁸⁹ J.D. Shaw, “Church and State,” *Independent Pulpit* 6 (November, 1888), 230.

from several thousand to a few hundred.⁹⁰ Everything threatened to unravel. Many “felt that we had suffered irreparable defeat,” Cranfill reflected. Some ministers, such as the Methodist Reverend Elijah Shettles, would later disown the entire 1887 campaign.⁹¹ Scourged and humiliated, the movement stood on the precipice of defeat. But from that precipice, a concerted core of clerics stood to shelter the crippled, infant movement onto its more sure-footed future.

Surveying defeat, this band of activists felt they had blundered by entertaining a self-conscious hesitation. Ashamed at having censored themselves and angry that they had been politically handcuffed, many felt that their own reluctance to agitate openly—their capitulation to anticlerical expectations—had been their greatest liability.⁹² According to this interpretation, too few religious leaders recognized that they truly were, in fact, political preachers. Afraid to confront that reality, weak-kneed reformers lacked conviction, settled upon a washed-out rhetoric, tolerated internal dissension, and stumbled their way to defeat. Activists vowed not to repeat these mistakes. They hoped to build a broader and deeper movement, one buoyed by a distinct and powerful worldview. Over the coming decades, the apostles of clericalism spread their clerical culture throughout the state’s religious establishment. They taught their colleagues to see the world as they saw the world, to traffic in a noble religious history, and to share the convictions of a fighting faith. Over the coming decades, they sowed the seeds of the clerical triumph. They convinced their peers of the unceasing need to agitate and

⁹⁰ Cranfill, *Dr. J. B. Cranfill’s Chronicle*, 351.

⁹¹ “It is generally understood,” Shettles claimed, “that the brewerys [sic] and distilleries outside the state brought on the election that they might with more security make investments.” Elijah Shettles, unfinished manuscript of *The Recollections of a Long Life*, Elijah L. Shettles Papers, 1792-1940, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

⁹² Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley*, 94, 100-2.

organize, to demand a stake in public life, and to bend politics to their whim. Thus began the first chapter in the making of the Bible Belt.

CHAPTER THREE

Of Tremor and Transition: Spiritual Crisis and the Origins of Clericalism

The late-nineteenth century inaugurated a golden age of church growth. Like the age's railroads, meatpacking plants, and steel mills, religion boomed. Memberships soared, denominations expanded, and imposing new church buildings pierced the skies. Professionalization dismounted Methodist circuit riders and gave part-time Baptist preachers full-time jobs. Salaries, visibility, and prestige all bolstered a new professional caste presiding over growing congregations in magnificent new churches. Inside, religious leaders would have been forgiven for throwing confetti and reveling in their ever-expanding conquests. But that was not to be. Religious leaders built and filled large stone churches and complained of infidelity; they drew large salaries and felt slighted; newspapers carried their sermons and they felt ignored; they were big, and felt small.

Instead, evangelical Texans comprehended and universally lamented a religious landscape of empty churches, disrespected preachers, unholy cities, indolent congregants, and a hostile public. They saw an irresponsible secular press, an amoral public school system, and a godless government. Each and every pillar of the modern world, they thought, absented God, and absented themselves. Adrift in the infant New South, their large churches and expanding congregations afforded them no anchor or weight against the weightlessness of their world. Preachers labored and succeeded in their own ministries yet perceived themselves powerless. Anxiety shook the common foundations

of their religious world, but this shared sense of crisis was not inevitable. Nor was it accidental.

In their writings and preaching, religious leaders illuminated the contours of their misfortune and disseminated their desperate vision. They taught one another to interpret the world through crisis, to see the world through their own anxious prism, and to speak the language of embattlement. For a generation of emerging religious leaders, the crisis defined their world. But in large part the clerics themselves were accomplices to its creation and, since crisis drove the clerical crusades, clerics, in effect, created the engine of their own efforts. The crisis drove reformers into the world. All their actions against government and society and public morality depended upon its assumed reality. Suddenly finding no refuge in their cloistered denominational worlds, they turned outward. They had to turn outward. They sought the means to bridge the yawning gap between their ambitions and their reality and could only find them in the public realm, for their efforts began in and forever depended upon their universal sense of spiritual crisis. It imparted a collective identity, minimized internal difference, and compelled religious Texans to act. More importantly, it conferred gravity and meaning to seemingly meaningless lives. It allowed clerics the means to play martyrs without paying the martyr's price. It offered Texans an outlet. It offered a battle to be waged and won. And it drove Texas religion irreversibly into the world. Clerics planted the seeds of action in the rich soil of spiritual crisis and harvested a revolution: the Bible Belt. That story begins in the turn-of-the-century world.

As a century closed and another opened, Americans everywhere grappled with modernity. Railroads and corporations touched every town and hamlet, the great cities

wrenched their populations from American farms and foreign lands, and orderly managers bureaucratized an unstructured American system. Meanwhile, ravenous markets devoured artisans and anachronized the romantic American yeomen. Everything solid, as Marx suggested, seemed to be melting into air, everything holy, profaned. The presumed anchors of American culture suddenly seemed weightless.

Amid all of the era's glorious material benefits and all of their debauching social side-effects, a plague of worry infected turn-of-the-century Americans. "Anxiety," the renowned historian Robert Wiebe wrote, "like the common cold, was a most egalitarian malady."¹ The pandemic wrought fervent soul-searching and a brooding aimlessness. No region escaped its crippling effects and no class proved immune. The clerk, the farmer, the patrician, the laborer, the Yankee, the southerner, the westerner: all wondered and worried. Even as they braced themselves, they forever doubted the surety of their footing.

The Mason-Dixon Line offered the South no reprieve or exemption from modernity's angst machine. There, boosters proclaimed a New South, one unbound by the barbarism of slavery, invisible to the debasing realities of cotton farming, and silent on the region's racial cruelties. They preached their New South creed and prophesied the transformative Midas touch of business. They promised nothing short of regional redemption. Although what they delivered was something else entirely, New South realities still shocked the region.

Out of the ashes of slavery and war and reconstruction, steadily strengthening manifestations of the New South filled southerners with unease, and crippling insecurities

¹ Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 76.

flourished alongside New South hopes.² The promise and the peril: men and women breathed them both. “The New South was an anxious place,” historian Edward Ayers wrote, and turn-of-the-century southerners lived anxious lives.³ They embarked on an unsure path. Their world seemed unmoored, set adrift—and imperiled. Men and women in all walks of life found themselves thrust into a new world. Suddenly unrestrained commerce and unholy amusement—cities, saloons, railroads, and dance halls—menaced regional sensibilities. Every aspect of the New South brought worry. “There was a certain highly charged quality about everyday life in the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century South,” wrote historian Ted Ownby. Assumptions about work and class and race and religion and gender and the family were all faded or threatened or upended. Texans, like men and women throughout the industrializing world, confronted and renegotiated and redefined new worlds. Looking upon a world of cities and railroads, they worried. They worried about the new and strange commercial colossus astride them. Amid all the progress and promise, a universal unease haunted them.

Some simply surrendered to nervous tension. Historian Jackson Lears identified neurasthenia as the epidemic of the age.⁴ A wave of fatigue, anxiety, depression, and a thousand other related symptoms seemed to suddenly crash over the American people. Leading neurologists associated it with the frenetic new pace of American life and William James called it “Americanitis.” It was supposed to be the physical manifestation

² For general anxieties in the New South, see Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); for specifically religious anxieties, and their relationship to moral reform, see especially Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); and Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

³ Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, viii.

⁴ Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 7.

of the new age of anxiety. The diagnosis exploded among the middle and upper classes and it afflicted some of the leading lights of the emerging clerical movement in Texas. The Baptist luminary James B. Cranfill complained of life-long bouts of nervousness, or what he called “neurasthenic diathesis.” He suffered severe panic attacks. “If I had been a woman,” he confessed, “I would have sometimes been called hysterical.” He reported waking at night, feeling suffocated, and fearing death. He said he experienced this a thousand times. Other nights Cranfill lay awake, alone with his anxieties, hoping for sleep that would never come. “I have counted all the sheep in the universe,” he wrote. He often retired early “to take every advantage to get mental rest and to get quietude for my nerves, or I am unfit for the next day’s tasks.”⁵ He tried everything. He gave up tobacco and coffee. He became a functioning vegetarian. He chewed his food deliberately. He took cold baths daily. He exercised regularly. He avoided trains and factories and mills as best he could. And, in general, Cranfill abated his symptoms, though he never banished them and he accepted neurasthenia as a condition of life. But despite the occasionally exacting physical toll wrought by turn-of-the-century anxiety, a broader unease drifted over the country and over Texans. A full-blown spiritual crisis transcended the nervous exhaustion of neurasthenic bodies, infected the spiritual confidence of religious leaders, and reoriented the world of religion.

If anxiety struck millions of Americans, it hit religious leaders especially hard. The supposed arbiters of the rock of times, perhaps no single group proved as vulnerable: the disruption of tradition defamed them. Although many clergy embraced the New South creed and employed innovative modern means in their denominations, indeed *as*

⁵ James Britton Cranfill, *Dr. J. B. Cranfill’s Chronicle: A Story of Life in Texas, Written by Himself about Himself* (Fleming H. Revell Company: New York, 1916), 111.

many of them did so, religious leaders nevertheless feared the corrosive effects of hyper commercialism and an encroaching worldliness and pondered whether faith could survive the frenetic pace of modern life. The churches were in trouble, they said, and their anxious song echoed across the region.

Although many individuals and associations joyfully publicized their rapid gains in membership and church growth, a disquieting unease gripped the evangelical mainstream. “Optimism is a very stupid and hurtful sort of thing if it fails to face the facts,” Texan George Truett said in 1911, after the crisis had matured and a decade before he assumed the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention. Omens loomed everywhere, he said. “That man who will put his ear down and listen with a little care shall hear the rumblings of subterranean forces that hiss under the thin crust of our civilization.”⁶ By that time, a full-blown spiritual crisis infected the ranks of evangelical Texans, and religious leaders spoke easily in apocalyptic terms. It had been building for decades. Throughout the late-nineteenth century and into the twentieth, religious leaders spread the gospel of an impending spiritual catastrophe.

The published opinions of the Northwest Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, epitomized the growth of the crisis-stricken mindset. Each year a “state of the church” committee reported to the annual meeting and as late as the mid-1880s an unabashed optimism infused them all. Overseeing magnificent growth, the committee annually celebrated “a great ingathering of souls”⁷ and reported that “from almost every station and circuit and mission in the Conference the glad tidings come that

⁶ George W. Truett, “The Coming of the Kingdom in America,” in *The Baptist World Alliance, Second Congress, Philadelphia, June 19-25, 1911: Record of Proceedings* (Philadelphia, Pa., Harper & Brother Company, for the Philadelphia Committee, 1911), 421-429. 422.

⁷ *Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual Session of the Northwest Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Galveston: Shaw & Blaylock, 1883), 28.

the work of revival has gone gloriously on.”⁸ As the years passed, however, their outlook soured. Already they acknowledged working “in the face of brazen unbeliefs, amid the exultant shout of boastful infidelity and the trembling of the fearful,”⁹ yet they maintained a positive outlook. The 1887 statewide prohibition campaign exposed clergy to an unprecedented barrage of criticism and the committee admitted “the election contest swept the State over on waves of extravagant bitterness, piling up the extremes of deformity; whirling and surging and seething angularity and prejudice and venom in the storm-wrought commotion. Of this the preachers shared, as victims beyond the lot of any other class.”¹⁰ The trauma of the campaign catalyzed the first nebulous feelings of embattlement but the steeled committee members resisted despair. They “have said ‘be it so; if we suffer with Christ we shall also reign with Him.’” They recognized adversaries yet remained hopeful and proclaimed “an ever-brightening day.”¹¹ That positive sentiment withered over the coming decade. By the following year, 1888, ambivalence intruded. The committee members, they said, “note with pleasure some degree of improvements in the spirituality of the membership throughout our bounds. And yet, the tide of spiritual life in the church is far below what the grace, power and promise of God would warrant.”¹² The Northwest Conference lagged behind their brethren in adopting the language of crisis but they inhabited the same anxious world and they too soon succumbed to its dictates. When they did, they could illuminate the crisis as well as any other.

⁸ *Minutes of the Twentieth Annual Session of the Northwest Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Galveston: A. W. & Co., 1885), 26.

⁹ *Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual Session*, 28.

¹⁰ *Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual Session*, 32.

¹¹ *Minutes of the Twenty-Second Annual Session of the Northwest Texas Conference, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Waxahachie, Tex.: Enterprise Book and Job Print, 1888), 32.

¹² *Minutes of the Twenty-Third Annual Session of the Northwest Texas Conference, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Dallas: Ewing B. Bedford, 1888), 30.

The committee's reports darkened until they admitted no hope or promise. By 1898, the committee reported that "we have reached in the order of Divine Providence a crisis that is recognized by the most thoughtful minds of Christendom" and that "never before have such problems been presented." They lamented an "unusual and wide-spread spiritual dearth" and "a distressing apathy and hesitation upon the part of the Lord's hosts." They catalogued all of the standard complaints of their times. "The spirit of the age is intensely secular and materialistic," they said, "and its blighting influence has affected the church." Moreover, the preachers were weak and the people wayward. There was "a seeming lack of unction and spiritual power in the pulpit" and "as pastors we find a want of deep Spirituality in our membership." Their membership neglected their spiritual duties, they said, and few prayed or kept the Sabbath or maintained deep religious conviction. Given over to worldliness, members had lost their "deep anguish of spirit" and "vital piety." The crisis had set in.¹³

The committee's reports arrived late to the growing consensus. By the turn of the century, the spiritual crisis transcended the pulpit and infected much of the laity. Expressions of crisis could be heard everywhere. While a young law student at the University of Texas, Morris Sheppard joined the Methodist Church and became active in the Epworth League, the church's burgeoning youth organization. Deploying the same mix of personal magnetism and moral fervor that would later win him a United States Senate seat, Sheppard rallied support for the League by speaking to the times. Addressing League members in San Antonio in 1896, the twenty-one year old Sheppard neatly captured the anxious clerical worldview. He could not be clearer. "The present is

¹³ *Minutes of the Thirty-Third Annual Session of the Northwest Texas Conference, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Temple: Gresham Bros., 1898), 51-54.

distinctly a period of tremor and transition,” he said, and “an era of bewildering incertitude in every phase of life and form of thought.” Sheppard, though himself no clergyman, would rise with the coming clerical tide because he so fluently spoke its language. He saw what the clerics saw. Like his clerical contemporaries, he found no promising New South rising around him, but, instead, saw his world enshrouded in peril. “Problems of almost inconceivable magnitude and of unexampled complexity are forming,” he said, and, sparing no hyperbole, warned that “the first sun of the twentieth century may illuminate a scene of universal war” and “revolutions may come in cataclysms and as swollen waters through a broken dike.” By expositing the spiritual crisis so clearly, Sheppard revealed how contagious it could be for men and women of his generation.¹⁴ People everywhere believed religion was in trouble.¹⁵

Within the crisis-struck world, God, ministers, and the churches all seemed devalued and powerless.¹⁶ Such thinking pierced the entire South and the nation at large.¹⁷ In 1880 the *Virginia Religious Herald* asked “Is the Pulpit Losing Its Power?” The Tennessee *Southern Methodist Review* reported that “the preacher once received all reverence” but now, it seemed, the daily paper and a thousand other secular influences shaped morals and social habits and the pulpit had faded into irrelevance.¹⁸ The nation devoured the Midwestern Social Gospeler Josiah Strong’s *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Present Crisis* and its “proofs of our national peril.”¹⁹ Meanwhile, the great

¹⁴ Morris Sheppard, “His Eloquent Words on the Influences of The Epworth League,” Speech Delivered in San Antonio, 1896, Morris Sheppard Papers, 1894-1953, Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

¹⁵ Ayers, *Promise of a New South*, 163.

¹⁶ Schweiger, *Gospel Working Up*, 169-180; Ayers, *Promise of a New South*, 163.

¹⁷ See Paul Carter, *Spiritual Crisis*.

¹⁸ Quoted in Beth Barton Schweiger, *Gospel Working Up*, 180.

¹⁹ Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Present Crisis* (New York: Baker & Taylor Co., 1885), v.

German sociologist Max Weber predicted religion's imminent death. It would be rationalized away, he said, murdered by modernity. Religious leaders feared that he might be right. Everywhere, and especially in the South, crisis gripped the clerical mind. When the Texas Baptist George Truett said "in our great country irreverence grins in the face of God,"²⁰ he could have been speaking in any part of what would soon become known as the Bible Belt. Pessimistic spiritual forecasts and indictments of worldly society dominated religious thinking in the South and Texas differed not at all. There, as elsewhere, the gloomy thoughts of clergymen and laity settled upon several common and specific themes: the invasion of "worldliness," the decline of church-going, and, perhaps most importantly, the decaying reputation of religious leaders. Each would prove vital in fostering the development of clerical culture. Texans emphasizes them all.

Although many ministers welcomed economic development and praised "progress," a perhaps ill-defined indictment of the modern world nevertheless penetrated the clerical ranks. The explosive growth of the state's cities came to symbolize that world. Many imagined the cities, widely regarded as the front lines of the coming New South, as spiritual vacuums. City dwellers, it was believed, hardly went to church. A *Texas Christian Advocate* editorial said "Some go once a Sunday; some go only when it is convenient; some, we are told, do not go at all." Even church members seemed unmoved. "The great majority of our city members," the *Advocate* said, "are more or less indifferent."²¹ But religious unease transcended towns and cities. Modernity's tentacles touched the entire country and penetrated into every isolated town and rural hamlet. One rural Methodist preacher wrote that even in his small community "They are in such close

²⁰ George W. Truett, "The Coming of the Kingdom," 424.

²¹ Quoted in J. D. Shaw, "The Decay of Church-Going," *Independent Pulpit* 4 (August, 1886), 138.

touch with the world, that they are no longer the “ignorant country folk” of a decade back. I found there, and I find every where I go, men ... know what the world is doing. They know what every thing is doing except the Church.”²² Most clergy, however, intoxicated by the promise of the New South, refrained from simple indictments of an encroaching commercialism. Instead, the turn-of-the-century lamenters spoke to a broader and more abstract menace, “worldliness.” Whatever that meant—and it meant different things to different people—it led to two indisputable truths: a decline in church-going and a fading respect for the religious profession.

A belief in the decline of church-going anchored the spiritual crisis. Anxious Texans believed fewer and fewer of their brethren honored the Sabbath with church attendance. In 1887, *The Texas Christian Advocate* published a lengthy editorial titled “The Decay of Church-Going.” “Our people,” it argued, “are unfaithful to the duty of church-going. God’s house, with many of them does not stand first, but second. Some go once a Sunday; some go only when it is convenient; some, we are told, do not go at all.”²³ The *San Antonio Evening Light* reported that “not more than one-half the pews [in the city] are regularly occupied on Sunday, and in many houses of worship, built and maintained at a great expense, the proportion is less.”²⁴ The Northwest Texas Conference’s prototypical lament noted only that “Attendance upon preaching is not as general as it should be.”²⁵ In 1904, an ecumenical council of churchwomen in Palestine attempted a census of the city’s church members to stimulate attendance.²⁶ In Hearne,

²² Lee to Shettles, N.D., Elijah L. Shettles Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

²³ Quoted in J. D. Shaw, “The Decay of Church-Going,” *Independent Pulpit* 4 (August, 1886), 138.

²⁴ *San Antonio Evening Light*, February 17, 1883.

²⁵ *Minutes of the Thirty-Third Annual Session*, 30.

²⁶ *Palestine Daily Herald*, February 19, 1904.

concerned citizens lamented the “neglect of religion” and claimed that “the people of this age, unlike their ancestors of a generation or several generations back, have so many interests a large proportion of them do not appear to be able to spare the time for church attendance and spiritual devotion.”²⁷ So many different groups complained about a decay of church-going in so many different places that it became conventional wisdom. “It is generally admitted,” the *Dallas Morning News* editorialized in 1907, “that there is a notable decline in church-going.” Whatever the reasons—and clergy always eagerly discussed the reasons—most conceded that declining attendance “is a matter often discussed with grave concern by pastors and others who take an active part in religious work.” It became gospel.

Intimately tied to the standing of churches and Christianity, indeed inevitably and irreversibly so, was the standing of Christian clergymen. Empty churches indicted religious leaders: a rebuke upon the church was a rebuke upon its leaders. Here the spiritual crisis became personal. Throughout the era, clergymen complained about diminished authority and imagined themselves mired in crisis and assaulted upon all sides. Such figures saw the religious world crumbling around them and themselves powerless to stop it. The neurasthenic Baptist editor J. B. Cranfill, as with so much else, best captured the embattled clerical mindset. In his 1908 book, *Courage and Comfort*, he wrote: “There are those who hate the preachers. They curse the churches, they are opposed to Sunday-schools, they execrate the Bible, but every man who so lives and does is as rotten at the heart as Ahab. One of the finest tests of a man’s heart character is the esteem in which he holds God’s preachers, God’s churches, and all holy things. A man is as much judged by the company he does not keep as by the company he keeps. He is as

²⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, August 16, 1908.

much judged by the things he hates as the things he loves. Every evil man on earth, who persists in evil and whose heart is set toward hell, hates preachers, opposes churches, and rails out against all God's enginery of good."²⁸ Looking back on his early career in the late-nineteenth century, the prominent Texas Methodist George Rankin recalled that "churches were not generally respected and a preacher was no more than any other man. His cloth amounted to nothing."²⁹ Outside the churches, antireligious critics goaded the preachers. The freethinking editor James D. Shaw interpreted the decline as "a merited rebuke to the arrogance of clerical egotism and a sign that the sanctuary is losing its hold upon the people."³⁰ He said New South advances were "too much for ecclesiasticism" and that "their [the preachers'] calling has survived its usefulness."³¹ Clergymen resolved to forestall that reality. Rankin and Cranfill, in fact, perhaps best articulated the perceived assault upon their profession and carried with them forever an obsessive need to magnify their office and their personal standing. But they had not yet discovered the means.

As the decades passed and the crisis spread, more and more became concerned for the future of religion and attempted to diagnose the cause of empty churches and libeled preachers. Worldliness, according to common reasoning, crippled churches and impugned their shepherds. Anxious Texans blamed some combination of hyper commercialism, worldly diversions, secular education, poor parenting, too much politicking, and too little politicking. Nevertheless, whatever *it* was, it was external. The *News* conceded that, maybe, "the 'getting along without religion,' to whatever extent it

²⁸ J. B. Cranfill, *Courage and Comfort: Or, Sunday Morning Thoughts* (Nashville, Tenn.: The Southwestern Company, 1908), 241.

²⁹ George C. Rankin, *The Story of My Life, or, More Than Half a Century as I Have Lived It and Seen It Lived* (Nashville: Smith & Lamar, 1912), 315.

³⁰ J. D. Shaw, "The Decay of Church-Going," *Independent Pulpit* 4 (August, 1886), 138.

³¹ J. D. Shaw, "The Prohibition Campaign," *Independent Pulpit* 5 (September, 1887), 163.

exists, may be due much less to any substantial change in the spiritual state and attitude of men than to the great change which has taken place in the social structure of civilization and the means of gratifying the social instinct.”³² In a world of saloons and theatres and social clubs, what appeal could the church make? From these instinctual resentments emerged a new enemy for clergymen and lay leaders to combat. Far removed from their pulpits and pews, the threat lay somewhere “out there,” in the world, somewhere beyond the traditional borders of evangelicals’ Christ-centered world. If it could be defeated and conquered and subdued, perhaps the churches could be liberated from its stranglehold and society cleansed of its moral pollution. They dreamed wonderful dreams of life without those diversions. Inadvertently, they plotted those very dreams into their own past. They imagined an Edenic paradise unsullied by the sin and corruption of worldliness. Nostalgia anchored Texans’ indictment of their present.

Religious leaders produced depictions of the past that were as sunny and wonderful as their depictions of the present were dark and sinful. The anxious Baptist leader James Cranfill often waxed sentimental. His particular nostalgic vision aggregated public respect, clerical humility, and good Christian homes: “The preacher in those good days was never thought of as a ‘dead-beat,’ but he was revered as a messenger of God, and his fervid talks, pathetic prayers, and soulful exhortations made an impress on the unpretentious home that has worked lasting good in the lives of the little ones that grew up in that Christly atmosphere.”³³ One turn-of-the-century Texas author, E. B. Fleming, remembered only a universal godliness in his youth. He could “not remember of hearing of a skeptic or infidel in the whole county as far back as forty-five years ago.

³² *Dallas Morning News*, May 12, 1907.

³³ Cranfill, *Courage and Comfort*, 245

Everybody who could get religion was a member of some church, and those who could not get it rarely ceased to try, and never seemed to doubt the reality of heaven and hell, the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible.” The spiritual story of Texas, as Fleming and others told it, was a tragic “rise and fall” account. If their contemporaries disrespected the clergy, derided the church, and profaned the Sabbath, their forebears worshipped openly and honestly and unequivocally. Their memories overflowed with visions of respect and local prestige. “Religion was far more universally respected than now,” Fleming said.³⁴ Their memories outlawed any other reading. In the nostalgic mind, religion once crowned itself with respect and admiration but that universal deference died and now religion languished, usurped by the irreligious and anticlerical villains of the day. Such declension narratives grounded the clerics’ turn-of-the-century worldview, fueled their modern-day jeremiads, and eventually led to their great worldly crusades.

At first, religious Texans groped for some means to mollify their present. Beset by a disquieting reality yet lured by the idea of a retrievable golden age, many in Texas called for a return to “that old-time religion.” Indictments of staid pastors preaching theological abstractions flowed freely over the region. “I know if the spirit of evangelization died out of our churches that our churches must die,” said J. B. Gambrell, soon to become a leading Baptist cleric.³⁵ According to this argument, religion faded when the time-tested spirit of evangelism withered. A weak creed bred weak churches. Revivalists sought to rekindle old evangelical fires and so light in men and women a new faith bright enough to draw strangers in from the New South wilderness. They sought a

³⁴ E. B. Fleming, *Early History of Hopkins County, Texas: Biographical Sketches and Incidents of the Early Settled Families* (n.p.: 1902), 35-36.

³⁵ J. B. Gambrell, “Evangelization of the Rural Districts,” *The Baptist World Alliance, Second Congress, Philadelphia, June 19-25, 1911: Record of Proceedings* (Philadelphia, Pa., Harper & Brother Company, for the Philadelphia Committee, 1911), 203-207, 204.

spiritual renewal, a turn back to the simple message of a saving faith. “There is to some extent,” the *Dallas Morning News* reported, “a feeling that Christianity as it exists today is imperfect because of compromises with the world—that a return to the pure teachings of the gospels would bring about a new and much better order.”³⁶ Or, as Gambrell put it, “you can not fiddle people into church.”³⁷ Religious leaders forever favored this strategy. Consistent with the historical appeal of their evangelical faiths, it attracted all. Even the politicized clerics of the coming decades, such as Gambrell, called for evangelical renewal while they simultaneously waged very public, political crusades. As time passed, a distinct revivalist strain branched off into one pure form, developed to oppose the clerical culture, and fractured evangelical religion in Texas. But in its infancy a renewed revivalism universally appealed to a frightened regional religious culture. In their churches and other denominational institutions, religious leaders called upon their colleagues to work within the denominational structure and along traditional lines to redeem their fallen society. This culminated the logic of early evangelical theology—that society was nothing but an aggregation of individual souls and the winning of those souls would win the world. Clergymen eventually confronted the limits of individual conversion and traditional methods in assuaging the spiritual crisis, but it took them an excruciatingly long period to arrive at this conclusion that the problems of the age were external, and not internal, and that the solutions lay in extra-denominational work and not in the narrow church worlds they were accustomed to.

The sad career of William Carey Crane illustrates the tragic realization of those limits. As ministers toiled away saving souls, many questioned their work. They saw

³⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, May 12, 1907.

³⁷ Gambrell, “Evangelization,” 204.

themselves running in place, going nowhere. They worked hard but saw few results and felt less satisfaction. Many tried whatever they could to rescue themselves from despondency. Without a proper path, many failed. Crane, a Virginia-born Baptist who settled in Texas, typified the proto-clerics' anxious and undirected groping. At once eager and ambitious, yet depressingly aimless, Crane traveled westward seeking whatever distinction the Baptist Church could offer. He settled first in Mississippi and set about working within the denominational world.

Armed with ambition, a bookish intelligence, and two degrees from Columbian College (now George Washington University), Crane spent the 1840s and 1850s climbing Mississippi's denominational ladder. The capable and determined Baptist leader achieved ever more prestigious appointments to pulpits and university presidencies. By the time he was forty, Crane, in addition to regular preaching, presided over a denominational college, co-edited the *Mississippi Baptist*, had co-founded and served as vice president of the Mississippi Historical Society, and served as secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention.³⁸ But none of this satisfied Crane. His insatiable ambitions pushed him ever onward.

After a brief and apparently contentious stay in Louisiana, Crane accepted a pastorate at Houston's First Baptist Church.³⁹ Before assuming the pulpit, however, he arrived in the city in July of 1863 and met with the trustees of Baylor University at Independence. Impressed, they offered Crane the presidency of the institution and Crane, lured by the promises of a prominent station and a substantial paycheck, happily

³⁸ Travis L. Summerlin, "CRANE, WILLIAM CAREY," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fcr06>), accessed April 09, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association; William Carey Crane Papers, The Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

³⁹ See entries in for March and June, 1863, in Crane Diary, William Carey Crane Papers.

accepted. The decision was a disaster. The appointment—and the paycheck—would prove anything but lucrative. At Independence, Crane’s life-long ascension stumbled and stopped. Historian Daniel Stowell has written of southern religious leaders’ successes in “rebuilding Zion” after the war, but that success was never easy and certainly never uniform.⁴⁰ For over two decades Crane languished in material ruin, intellectual frustration, and psychological distress. When Crane turned his back on the First Baptist Church, he had imagined himself as the head of a great regional institution. Instead, after a month as president, Crane concluded that “Baylor University is nothing but a day school for Independence boys.” He would simply write “Do not like the course of affairs here at all.”⁴¹ His depressing sentiments would survive the conclusion of the Civil War and the tumult of Reconstruction. Trapped in Independence, Crane spent these years, his final twenty-one, reflecting wearily on a wasted life.

Crane strove to keep Baylor afloat but the university struggled for survival. “Very few sympathize or co-operate with me here,” Crane wrote on a snowy January day in 1878.⁴² The steady march of time brought only frustration, not progress. “This is the hardest community in which I ever dwelt,” Crane wrote, “and seems to be getting harder. There is very little appreciation either of preaching or well meant efforts, to do good or to build up an institution of learning.”⁴³ In 1882, Crane pronounced the “People lifeless” and the “Community indifferent to the fate of Baylor University.”⁴⁴ In 1886, after two

⁴⁰ Daniel Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*.

⁴¹ Crane Diary, February 3, 1864, William Carey Crane Papers.

⁴² Crane Diary, January 7, 1878, William Carey Crane Papers.

⁴³ Crane Diary, January 5, 1879, William Carey Crane Papers.

⁴⁴ Crane Diary, July 17, 1882, William Carey Crane Papers.

seemingly futile decades of labor, Crane declared “The state of things religious and education in Texas is anything but agreeable.”⁴⁵ Zion, this was not.

Crane taught most of the curriculum at Baylor, oversaw fundraising and typical administrative banalities, pursued his scholarly interests, and served as the full-time pastor of the Independence Baptist Church. For over two decades he toiled in Independence and for over two decades he exhausted his physical and financial resources. From the beginning the school’s perilous finances drained Crane of spirit and wealth. University trustees had promised him a \$3000 paycheck and a comfortable home. Neither came to pass.⁴⁶ Crane depleted whatever resources he had to keep the university afloat. “Thousands promised me have never been paid, promises from people & organizations able to pay,” Crane wrote in his diary. “I have spent nearly all my father left me to keep the educational enterprises of Independence in existence.”⁴⁷ Worse for the scholar (Crane would publish a well-read biography of Sam Houston), “My literary enterprises all hang fire, because of the difficulties, I encounter, in meeting monetary obligations, with repudiated endowment, repair pledges and delinquent tuition payers.”⁴⁸ But if financial difficulties sapped Crane’s enthusiasm, his ever diminutive social status devastated him.

As Crane toiled without visible reward, his hopes and ambitions rotted and turned sour. Crane was supposed to be a great man. People were supposed to know his name. Instead, Crane withered underneath the toxic weight of frustrated dreams and filled the

⁴⁵ Crane Diary, June 12, 1886, William Carey Crane Papers.

⁴⁶ E. Bruce Thompson, “William Carey Crane and Texas Education,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 58 (January 1955), 409.

⁴⁷ Crane Diary, March 17, 1880, William Carey Crane Papers.

⁴⁸ Crane Diary, June 12, 1886, William Carey Crane Papers.

twilight of his years with lamentations of self-pity. The few subjective observations in his otherwise sparse diary detail the man's crippling psychological burdens.

Crane embarked on his Independence work with the cruel memories of wasted years. Early in his tenure he reminded himself that "What little I have done for my Maker is all worth remembering."⁴⁹ Crane dedicated himself to exiling those memories. He threw himself into his work. "What remains of life," he wrote, "must be vigorously occupied."⁵⁰ But new work brought no reprieve. His labor at the university, at his pulpit, and at his writing desk could not satisfy him. "Alas!" he lamented, "my life is passing away with little utility to myself, with less to the world."⁵¹ He described himself as "dispirited"⁵² and "ever ill at ease."⁵³ Each passing year stung him deeper, and each birthday filled him only with the sour memories of empty years. "Today I am sixty years old," Crane wrote on March 17, 1876. "The thought is a terrible one, for with it comes busy memories of failures, shortcomings, misimprovement, and evil. I have aimed high and tried to do good, but difficulties, dangers, and troubles of every sort have entangled my steps."⁵⁴ No matter how determined or dedicated to the Baptists' religious mission, Crane never felt the warmth of a fight well fought. His name filled few newspapers. No politicians called for his endorsement. Outside of the state's insular religious world, few took notice of him. Beset with the anxieties of a half-led life, Crane died unfulfilled. In

⁴⁹ Crane Diary, March 17, 1864, William Carey Crane Papers.

⁵⁰ Crane Diary, June 18, 1876, William Carey Crane Papers.

⁵¹ Crane Diary, March 17, 1865, William Carey Crane Papers.

⁵² Crane Diary, February 4, 1864, William Carey Crane Papers.

⁵³ Crane Diary, March 7, 1865, William Carey Crane Papers.

⁵⁴ Crane Diary, March 17, 1876, William Carey Crane Papers.

January of 1885, only weeks before his death, Crane complained that, “faced by difficulties, misunderstood and misrepresented, my lot has been a hard one.”⁵⁵

In a hostile world, Crane, above all, had to justify his life’s work. He needed some evidence of his utility. Instead, every birthday confronted Crane with a long train of uselessness. He wanted only to be useful, for someone to notice and approve of his efforts. To win some limited approval. This was in Crane and in so many others of the coming generation. Striving amid the postbellum spiritual crisis, they needed an outlet. The hints, perhaps, were there. Crane noticed the energy attending his temperance sermons. He gleefully engaged himself lobbying congressmen and organizing petitions for several educational schemes. But Crane always blamed himself. Like most southern evangelicals of the nineteenth century, he directed blame inward (“I can but suppose that is my sinful nature, which has caused me the troubles of my life,” he mused⁵⁶). A new generation of clerical activists would turn that frustration outward, direct it against a culture, and build for themselves a movement. A new generation wouldn’t suffer anxieties without comment. They would ask why, and clerics would provide an answer. But, given all of their wonderful gains, how did southern evangelicals despair in the first place?

Reality, of course, contradicted several common assumptions about religious decline. “Complaints frequently appear in both secular and religious papers concerning the decay of interest in religious affairs among the people of the United States,” the *Dallas Morning News* wrote in 1900, “but they are not justified by the statistics.”⁵⁷ After

⁵⁵ Crane Diary, January 16, 1885, William Carey Crane Papers, quoted in Thompson, “Crane and Education,” 421.

⁵⁶ Crane Diary, March 7, 1865. William Carey Crane Papers.

⁵⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, November 24, 1900.

the tumult of the Civil War—which, perhaps surprisingly, rarely entered into clerical laments—Texas churches prospered. All available data show remarkable growth in communicants, seating capacity, buildings, and property value. From 1870 to 1890, the formative years of the crisis culture, the population of Texas almost tripled—it grew 273 percent. Meanwhile, there were almost nine times as many churches that together could seat almost eight times as many people. Between 1890 and 1906 (the years of two detailed national religious censuses), the population of Texas increased 58 percent; church membership surged 89 percent. The value of church property and the salaries of clergymen increased as well.⁵⁸ Nearly every denomination shared in the harvest. Contemporary demographer Henry King Carroll, evaluating census returns, noted that Texas “had an unusual growth in the period under consideration,” even for the South, where “it will be found that in every State, save North Carolina alone, the net increase in communicants was large, considerably larger than the net increase of population, showing that the Churches in that section of the country, whatever may be said of other sections, enjoyed a high measure of prosperity.”⁵⁹ Even the Methodist’s brooding Northwest Texas Conference saw fifteen solid years of growth—its membership tripled—before declaring the crisis in 1898. These were boom years for religion—why didn’t this wonderful growth mollify clerical concern?

It is clear, and historians have noted, that religious leaders gave themselves to anxious worry at the precise moment their churches exploded with growth. The evidence seems to beg the obvious: How could evangelical Christians believe themselves so fragile

⁵⁸ U. S. Census Office, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, Parts I and II (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910).

⁵⁹ Henry King Carroll, *The Religious Forces of the United States Enumerated, Classified, and Described; Returns for 1900 and 1910 Compared with the Government Census of 1890: Condition and Characteristics of Christianity in the United States* (New York: C Scribner’s Sons, 1912), lxvi.

and besieged while they achieved such great triumphs?⁶⁰ Why didn't their triumphs evaporate their fears and set their minds at ease? But these are the wrong questions. Clerical laments often misdiagnosed the crisis—churches weren't emptying, they were filling—but perhaps, in their broad outlines, these cries were not irrational or manipulative, but perceptive. While all the objective measures observable in census reports and church records corroborated a narrative of fantastic and explosive growth, they veil the limits of religion in the turn-of-the-century world. Religious leaders carried the cause of Christ to new heights but their conquests were narrowly limited to memberships and fundraising and advances within the denominational world, and while spectacular, these were not the currency of the clerical economy. Whether men and women gave themselves to Christ (and, according to all available statistics, they did in ever greater numbers) ultimately proved incidental; the triumph of clericalism turned not on the winning of souls, the building of churches, or the heights of denominationalism, but on the respect and deference accorded to religion by the public world, on their standing in the social arena. Here was the site of battle. Here was where religious leaders staked their claim to leadership and here was where they felt most threatened. While institutional religion thrived, evangelical Protestants nevertheless felt their authority challenged and diminished. Distinctions must be drawn, therefore, between the rising incidence of religious belief and the power and influence vested in religious institutions and their role within a larger social and cultural world.⁶¹

⁶⁰ For the most direct questioning along these lines, see Beth Barton Schweiger, "How Would Jesus Vote? The Prehistory of the Christian Right," *Reviews in American History* 32 (March, 2004), 49-57.

⁶¹ Mark Chaves, "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority" *Social Forces* 72 (March, 1994), pp. 749-774. Generations of social scientists and scholars gave themselves over to studying the consequences of "secularization." Religion, it was commonly assumed, could never survive the onslaughts of modernity and cultural pluralism. As various social institutions were unmoored from religious bearings, scholars assumed religious belief would crumble. And yet, rather than retreat, religious adherence advanced. This

As historian Ted Ownby so vividly demonstrated, the all-entangling reality of modernity exposed local church fiefdoms to the corruptions of the world. New forms of cultural authority wrenched the locus of authority from homes and pulpits and put them in boardrooms, factory floors, and saloon halls. In the variegated social structure of the turn of the century, religion suddenly occupied one distinct sphere among many. In the new world of commerce and industrialism, distant market forces and daily papers and political leadership all wielded enormous influences. The ability to define social reality, and the initiative to do so, seemed to rest in these forces, and not in God's. Even as its churches boomed, the capacity for evangelical Protestantism to regulate the lives of ordinary men and women diminished.

Religion has occupied different positions of influence at different places in different times. Religious authority, as any authority, rises and falls in conflict and competition. Always contingent, it rests on the willingness of its partisans to fight. As the Texas case proves, the fate of religious authority waxed and waned as a result of public conflicts between two forces, between the clerical champions who would see religion enthroned and the anticlerical critics who would see it repressed. In this manner the religious and secular spheres clashed. The spiritual and the secular locked themselves in combat and forced Texans to choose sides. When evangelicals' grasp of popular institutions and culture slipped, or seemed to, partisans jockeyed to maintain their standing, to bolster their organizational resources, and to reclaim their old standing, which, in historical terms, was really a newly sought after standing and a new role with new hopes for wide-ranging power and influence.

realization shook common assumptions about secularization and scholars scrambled to reorient research the beyond the realm of personal belief and social structure. See Phillip Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate" *American Sociological Review* 65 (February, 2000): 138-167.

If religious authority diminished, or seemed to, so did the new crop of professional clergymen, the human element of that authority. Preachers embodied the standing of religion. If religion weakened, they weakened. If men and women impugned the church, they impugned the churchmen and churchwomen. Texas culture twinned religious leaders and religious authority together and the clergymen and lay leaders never questioned the association and they themselves assumed that the connection could not be undone nor that it should be undone. The question of religious authority then became a question of the standing of religious leaders. That standing is and has always been variable. It could be fought for, and won.

When confronted with extinction, beleaguered social groups rarely surrender to despair. Few clergymen resigned themselves to decay, retreated into their pulpits, and idly awaited their inevitable obsolescence. Instead, outer threats spark the instinct for self-preservation and such groups strive to endure. The laws of their survival dictate such action. This happened throughout the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century United States. “Men from all walks of life,” Robert Wiebe wrote, “already shaken by an incomprehensible world, responded to any new upheaval as an immediate threat.” He added, in that flippant-yet-masterful style, that “they had no alternative, they felt, but to select an enemy and fight.”⁶² And fight they did. As the spiritual crisis festered, religious Texans looked for salvation. But where? By what means? They developed ambitions and goals but had no means. They tried traditional routes but found themselves flailing within their denominations. Until, that is, the pioneers of clericalism offered an outlet.

George Truett, the Baptist leader, later showed how the crisis could spur action. “In our great country,” he said in 1911, “the social world is filled with frivolities and

⁶² Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 76.

vanities, and the business world crowded with dishonesties, and the political world bathed with graft, and the religious world mocked by formalism that is never to bring Christ's people to their knees.” By 1911 his recitation of the spiritual crisis would have shocked no one. His words, by that point, were well worn, but he did not speak them for their own sake, but to rouse his contemporaries. “Oh,” he said, “this is no time, my brothers for that negative complacent soft-going optimism which says soothingly, ‘All is well.’ But what have I said this for? To chant a dirge? No, no. To sound out a jeremiad? No. But to beat a charge.”⁶³ Clerics had learned how to use the crisis to stimulate their generation into supporting an active and engaged religion. The clerics themselves would shape the specifics of that new, forceful faith. They would discover the potency of moral reform, particularly in that most alluring of crusades, prohibition. But their engagement, and the working out of a specific clerical culture, depended upon and grew out of the spiritual crisis.

Although the young Morris Sheppard seemed to be inviting despair among his young audience in 1896, he knew how to harness the spiritual crisis for positive action. The movement depended upon it. For every dread warning that “disaster frowns upon the brow of the future,” Sheppard would add his logical addendum: the times therefore demanded action. “The field for His labor is wide and fallow,” he said, “it offers the most brilliant and illiminable possibilities.” And if problems loomed, they were “problems which must be met and mastered by the young men and women of this generation.”⁶⁴ Together, Sheppard and his generation would draw their commission from their unease. Pilgrims need the wilderness.

⁶³ George W. Truett, “The Coming of the Kingdom,” 424.

⁶⁴ Morris Sheppard, “His Eloquent Words,” Morris Sheppard Papers.

The Methodist apostate James D. Shaw depicted the clergy reeling in desperation. He said the religious establishment foresaw its fate “but just what to do about it is a problem they know not how to solve.”⁶⁵ In the coming years he would echo common cries that moral reform was a government crutch for a fading faith, a way to enforce publicly what it no longer could privately. Perhaps he was right. In prohibition and other reforms, clerics found ecstasy in their pursuit of righteousness. By slaying a beast or curing some rapacious malady, the crusading clergymen redefined themselves as heroes and saviors, and not impotent, decaying, or anachronistic relics of some bygone age. They found a cause and a language that opened up a world with stakes, that was direct, and visceral.

Attacking public immorality—a monumental shift that, the following chapters will show, was achieved through great strife and controversy—achieved for ministers the public status and self-identity they craved. By engaging the saloons and the theaters and the dance halls, Methodist George Rankin believed a pastor’s “work counted for something as an asset in the community.” Without sinking into the depths of crisis, he would never have felt the void in the first place. Without venturing into worldly reform, he could have never filled it. He would have languished within the church, building up congregations, winning donations, and achieving ever-more prestigious appointments but, like Crane, finding only soul-crushing feelings of futility. Instead, moral reform added consequence to a suddenly inconsequential-seeming life. Evangelical Texans felt adrift in the world, and wanted some anchoring force to ground them and provide a stake in their moral future. William Crane felt beleaguered, always on the verge of success but never successful. He felt the crisis and had the ambition to challenge it, but he never

⁶⁵ J. D. Shaw, “The Prohibition Campaign,” *Independent Pulpit* 5 (September, 1887), 163.

found the means to conquer it, to channel it constructively. Rankin and others did. As Rankin put it, by pursuing reform the preacher found “His influence and personal presence stood for something, even outside his own congregation. He was a dominant factor in the forces that enter into the moral, the civic, and the religious life of the people.”⁶⁶ In the battle against sin, desperate clergymen transcended the limits of their pulpits and redefined themselves as society’s saviors. They found an enemy as vulgar and corrupt as they were pure and righteous. “In fighting the liquor traffic,” J. B. Cranfill wrote in 1916, “I have learned what it means to combat the most gigantic and soul-less corrupting agency this land has ever known.”⁶⁷ The future of southern religion, indeed American religion, depended on such men craving that titanic struggle and finding the means to wage it. As they did, perceptions of weakness led to the realities of strength.

Although evangelical Texans protested the onslaughts of modernity, and declared in a great chorus voice their weakness and vulnerability, their confrontations with the modern world only bolstered their political and cultural power. To put it another way, they prospered because of, and not in spite of, their confrontation with the modern world.⁶⁸ Threats didn’t weaken the churches, they invigorated them. In the face of hostility, real and imagined, evangelical Texans closed ranks. Their identity as religious persons intensified and became salient. The boundaries separating the sacred and the secular hardened and good Christian men and women manned those boundaries and believed that if the world penetrated those barriers then the cause of evangelical religion

⁶⁶ Rankin, *The Story of My Life*, 321.

⁶⁷ Cranfill, *Cranfill’s Chronicle*, 490.

⁶⁸ See R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) for the interplay of “outsiderhood” and “deliberate differentiation.” For the statistical reality of this phenomenon in contemporary evangelicalism, see Christian Smith and Michael Emerson, et al, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

fell and if that cause fell then all of Christendom and all that was good and right in the world would fall. Being a Christian suddenly carried new imperatives. They no longer went to church, volunteered, and donated to support mere institutions: they participated in church life to bolster God's beleaguered kingdom. If there had been no crisis or threats to religion, congregations risked routine and complacency. Now, Texans innovated.

In the decades around the turn of the century, Texas religion and southern religion and all religion shifted its orientation and its methods and its scope. Private and personal became public and political. Suddenly the religious world believed that public respect could not be shared, that it was not capacious enough to accommodate the secular press and public amusements and them. They made new claims to public respectability, influence, and relevance. As historian Beth Barton Schweiger has hinted, claims to lost respect and influence were in many ways “really just a matter of asking a different question.”⁶⁹ Suddenly religious leaders clamored for roles they had never played. Clergymen never lost some mythical centrality in public life—they never had it. Their distance from the world had been a mark of distinction, a point of pride. But now, seemingly menaced on all sides, religious leaders could no longer retire into isolation. If they did, they believed they would crumble. Instead, religious leaders armed themselves and demanded the world. Not only to be a part of it, but to conquer it. To preside over it. When they made these demands and found resistance, it only bolstered their claims to embattlement. The logic of the crisis culture thus sparked the clerical revolution and impelled its champions into the arena.

The evangelical activists shaping the culture of clericalism, of course, never shuttered themselves from the inroads of the New South or the novelties of modernity.

⁶⁹ Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 194.

Whatever their complaints, clergymen retreated into isolation or promoted their churches as unsullied enclaves from the world. Clergymen professionalized along the same lines as doctors and lawyers, their denominations bureaucratized just as any modern business organization would, and higher education assumed an ever greater importance in their denominational worlds. Reform efforts evinced the full employment of modern methods in fundraising, organization, and publicity. When the old structures of authority seemed to wither and fall, clerics armed themselves with their vast denominational structures and their presses and their books. In fact, according to their salaries and education levels, leading parishioners and reformers were actually *more* intimately apart of their New South world than many of their opponents. And however anti-modern their rhetoric, most believed in progress.⁷⁰ Whatever barriers reformers constructed between the churches and society, they were not impenetrable. Many groups ultimately denounced the reformers' obsession with worldly reform and retreated into their fortress religions, but the clerical champions dragged the mainstream of Texas evangelicalism into full engagement with the world. They used the world, but as they did they unceasingly criticized it, feared it, and attacked it. And they profited.

In the weeping tears of neurasthenic bodies, the vocal complaints of anxious clergymen, and the fearful reports of denominational bodies, the spiritual crisis of the late-nineteenth century spoke to a population wrenched by change and desperate for deliverance. A new corps of evangelical Texans offered them action. Senator Morris Sheppard and the state's religious establishment committed themselves to such issues as prohibition, they said, so that "man will rise ... again to be crowned with the confidence

⁷⁰ See T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

and approbation of Almighty God.”⁷¹ If they had never fallen, they could never have arisen. Their dissatisfaction drew them toward reform and compelled them to reclaim the world. The rising tide of clericalism attracted all those religious Texans resentful of the churches’ seeming devaluation. The coming culture of clericalism still needed to be preached and built and disseminated, but the spiritual crisis planted the seeds for that great harvest. Religious wishes and dreams now institutionalized in a vast and powerful bureaucracy, all their longing could be mobilized into a great crusade. By the 1920s, the cause of Christ had made such great strides in the South that, in the words of Edward Ayers, it “established a presence in private and public life they had never known before.”⁷² The crisis helps account for that transformation. It proved but one step on that long road from what historians have called “dissent to dominance,”⁷³ or “alienation to influence,”⁷⁴ but that lonely step led southerners headlong into the Bible Belt.

⁷¹ Morris Sheppard, *Congressman Sheppard is for Prohibition* (Fort Worth: Statewide Prohibition Amendment Association Headquarters, 1911), 8.

⁷² Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, ix-x.

⁷³ John Boles, “Evangelical Protestantism in the Old South: From Dissent to Dominance,” in *Religion in the South: Essays*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Jackson, Miss.: University of Mississippi Press, 1985).

⁷⁴ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 193; Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 6.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Road to the Bible Belt: Mobilizing the Godly

The accumulating burdens of the spiritual crisis pushed evangelical Texans to the brink. Whatever their swelling membership rolls, rising church spires, and skyrocketing budgets said, religion *felt* diminished. Spiritual power seemed diluted and weakened. Men and women moved freely from divine gravity and the evangelical universe appeared to be crumbling. Religious leaders, tasked with maintaining that universe, only flailed before the ferment of the age. In the minds of evangelical Texans, religion was imperiled. Christianity hung in the balance.

Past generations of social scientists grounded their research in assumptions of “secularization,” but then a curious thing happened: even as many institutions differentiated themselves from the secular, religious adherence persevered, and, indeed, even grew. But rather than explode a genre of research, this dawning reality only opened new possibilities: religion might not perish, but it can change. It can be vibrant or dull, its champions can be entangled or isolated, and its cultural authority can ebb and flow.¹ Religious Texans recognized this long before scholars. The pangs of the spiritual crisis awakened them to the capriciousness of religion and of religious authority. If they could be diminished, they said, so too could they be empowered.

The spiritual crisis opened despairing Christians to the possibilities of an activist faith. Crisis created opportunities for a new generation of activists. They would lead their denominations to power by targeting the public sphere. If it was the world that

¹ See especially Mark Chaves, “Secularization as Declining Religious Authority” *Social Forces* 72 (March, 1994), pp. 749-774.

diminished them, then it would be the world that would empower them. They convinced themselves that they could effect their own salvation. They proclaimed a monopoly on manners and morals, and a Midas Touch of social and moral regeneration. This was a many-sided, complex realization, but it pushed evangelical Texans on the paths of power.

Activists pushed their denominations into the Bible Belt. They worked their way into the denominational hierarchies, reinforced them, and then leveraged that strength against new enemies. The cutthroat denominational worlds they created culled the meek and empowered the ambitious. The Bible Belt emerged from leaders enmeshed in a matrix of ambition, denominations, and politics. Their momentum-building aggression stirred the foundations of their faith. They redirected religion. Thereafter, the path between the everyday and the divine ran unalterably through public life. More importantly to contemporary religious Texans, it led away from the spiritual crisis.

The religious world of the late-nineteenth century languished under anxiety and despair, but, as the century closed, new clerical champions promised a way out. Activist ministers developed the means to usher the faithful into a new era. “A crisis in the history of our country is certainly upon us,” B.H. Carroll freely admitted, but he asked “How shall we meet it? The opportunity of a lifetime is before us. How shall we use it?”² Men such as Carroll, the pioneers of the clerical culture, rooted their arguments in the very assumptions of the crisis. They did not reject the premises of the spiritual depression: they used them, and by using them, they confronted and defeated them. To religious Texans weary of worry, the culture of clericalism beckoned.

² B. H. Carroll, Personal Notebook of BH Carroll, Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection, Archives, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Speaking before a crowd at the Waco YMCA in 1893, J. B. Cranfill proposed an outlet from the languid torpor of those anxious times. “It isn’t always wise to carry our burdens on our hearts,” Cranfill said, “It isn’t wise to haunt the darkened corners and court the lowering clouds and listen for the mutterings of the storm.” However staggering the age’s moral and spiritual pallor, the self-proclaimed neurasthenic chastised his audience for surrendering to anxiety and fleeing so willingly toward helplessness. “It is far better,” he said, “to look up for the silvery light of the stars and listen and catch the paeans of joy and praise, to cast away the mold of sadness and sorrow on our heart that there may rest on it the song of the nightingale and the music of birds.” Cranfill urged his listeners to exile the spiritual crisis: “Brother,” he said, “if you are living in a graveyard, come out.”³

Religious citizens, Cranfill said, had the power to exile the psychological tyranny of the spiritual crisis. Instead of languishing, they could act. “The men of this world, whose tread have caused the earth to vibrate, the men of this world,” he said, “have made chances for themselves.” To Cranfill, religious Texans had two choices: they could turn backward or they could look forward. Backward meant turning away from society, retreating into the sanctuary of nostalgia, and lamenting the cruel developments that conspired to denigrate religion. According to Cranfill, that choice only would breed a chain of sorrow. The present generation would look backward their entire lives and ultimately regret that it had done nothing. And, recalling Edward Bellamy’s sensational 1885 novel *Looking Backward*, in which a time-traveling American visits a utopic year 2000 and, “looking backward,” finally perceives the barbaric cruelties of his own age,

³ J. B. Cranfill, “Looking Backward,” Lecture delivered by J. B. Cranfill at YMCA Hall, Waco, Texas, April 21, 1893. James Milton Carroll Collection, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

future generations would judge the present poorly. If the righteous consigned themselves to doing nothing, Cranfill said, their grandchildren “will discuss the brutality of an age when license was the pathway to hell.” Cranfill enjoined his listeners. “Will you look forward with me to a time when those children’s children of ours will say, ‘How could it be that my fathers, ... in the meridian splendor of their glory, licensed in that wonderful country ... 240,000 barrooms, the only business of which was to invite young men ... unto death and unto hell?’” If the present shrunk before its obstacles, surrendered to its malaise, and allowed immorality to rein, then history’s wrath would wrack religious Texans with remorse. But it didn’t have to be that way.⁴

Instead of conceding the field, ministers and church members could fight. They could challenge the wickedness of the world and reap the reward of righteousness. And what a reward it would be. They could finally find that soul-comforting satisfaction that had eluded a generation. At the end of the battle, Cranfill said, “You shall look across the border into the other land and grasp the hand of a Redeemer.” The apostles of clericalism promised that any who took the crusade would find harmony with God. More immediately, they promised salvation from the miseries of the spiritual crisis. The noxious haze of anxiety would lift and a flood of comfort and relief would wash over the land. “Looking forward to a time when all that here has been lost shall then be gained,” Cranfill said, “oh, will you look forward tonight to a redeemed nation, to a millennial splendor.” No group of religious southerners had ever before heard such things. No set of southern religious leaders had ever before said such things.

The young Morris Sheppard, though himself no preacher, outlined the contours of the spiritual crisis better than anyone. He said “the past is a wilderness of memories and

⁴ Cranfill, “Looking Backward,” J. M. Carroll Collection.

shadows; the present a chaos of deliriums and dreams; the future an abyss of dread and doubt.” But he too offered an escape. He believed it the work of the Epworth League, the Methodists’ youth organization, “to lead young men and women out of this abyss of misery.” But they had to have tools. Sheppard recognized “the supreme necessity for some influence that would give moral force and efficacy to the impulses and ambitions of youth.”⁵ If purpose-driven, the forces of Christendom could conquer all. The ensnared youth of the age could be spared, but only if church leaders could “implant in his soul a purity of purpose and a morality of principal that enables him to stand out against the corruption of his time like a great white column against the blackness of an approaching storm.” Sheppard outlined how to escape the spiritual crisis and implant the seeds of purpose in Christian Americans. He would find it in prohibition. As a United States Congressman and later a United States senator, Sheppard devoted himself to the crusade against liquor. The fluency with which the politician spoke the language of spiritual crisis and redemption by moral reform foretold the twinning of religion and politics in the clerical triumph. For Sheppard, prohibition was, according to his metaphor, his great white column. It was the primary means that he and his generation of religious Texans had to stand out against the blackness of the storm.

Such an intoxicating notion thrust religious Texans passionately and unapologetically into the world. The dissolution of the spiritual crisis demanded action. They had to fight. “Nothing is just going to happen,” Cranfill said, nothing would happen with idle witnesses proclaiming “Oh, it is going to happen, sure, going to happen.”⁶ No, a

⁵ Morris Sheppard, “His Eloquent Words on the Influences of the Epworth League,” speech delivered in San Antonio, 1896. Morris Sheppard Papers, 1894-1953, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

⁶ Cranfill, “Looking Backward,” J. M. Carroll Collection.

battle would come. And it would transform the entire history of southern religion. It would create the Bible Belt.

The seeds of clericalism found rich soil in activism. But early religious leaders struggled to identify the right type of activism. Would-be redeemers had traditional means at their disposal, and they tried them all. Many initial activists strove to resurrect the old-time religion through old-time means. In the spring of 1885, Baptist preacher Sumner Callaway read a sermon before a ministers' conference in Belton that embodied all of the accumulated fears of his generation with none of the clerical innovations of the next. He drew a familiar sketch of the imperiled age and recognized that it was the churches and their leaders that would save it: "The hold which Satan has upon the world," he said, "is so thorough and all-pervasive, so enters into the ramifications of the life of society, that whatever would break his grasp must be well nigh omnipotent, must indeed be all-powerful." This, in itself, was ground-breaking: southern churches had rarely before conceived of themselves as society's saviors. He realized that pulpits contained an enormous influence and that it was up to preachers to wield it. The church was not a static and stale institution but instead a dynamic base for activism—if the faithful so chose. "She [the church] is rendered the more powerful or is enfeebled according to the use made of her," Callaway said. But after taking this first step, Callaway and his cohort of traditionalists never advanced again beyond the confines of the old-time religion. When he told the gathering that "The church of Christ is the grand instrumentality through which the world is to be freed from the domination of Satan," he only followed with the soul-saving evangelicalism of generations past. Whereas future leaders would speak of clerics as shock troops in a moral war, Callaway still thought of

them as “towers and buttresses.” He identified religion’s primary strength in conversion, in born-again members becoming “the light of the world,” and in preachers proclaiming the Gospel. He spoke of individuals and individualism, he said, “for the character of the body will be fixed by that of the individuals composing it.”

Callaway wanted to conquer a new generation’s crisis with an old generation’s solutions. Promoting only a vague restorationism, he identified a consecrated church as “the key stone in the arch of its strength.” To weather the onslaught of the age, he said, the religious only had to retreat into their castles and man the defenses. If the church “clothe[d] herself with zeal,” it would be saved. Such thinking was losing its power over religious Texans. Callaway’s sermon embodied the anxieties of the age and illuminated a growing awareness that the churches had it within themselves to conquer the age’s evils. But the meager returns of the old-time methods and the enduring obscurity of their articulators testified to their inadequacy in exiling the spiritual crisis. Callaway was no leader and he proposed no real program for the churches’ salvation. In just a few short months, however, a Baptist leader would emerge in Waco with a practical plan that would revolutionize southern religion.⁷

Although B.H. Carroll won overwhelming public rebuke in his two forays into prohibition politics, he nevertheless captured the imagination of anxious religious Texans. As many grew disaffected with old-time methods, more and more turned to Carroll’s brand of a fighting faith. J.B. Cranfill, a Baptist leader and tireless advocate of prohibition, became a disciple. “To him more than any other man that ever lived,” Cranfill later wrote, “I owe such development along religious and theological lines as I

⁷ Sumner B. Callaway, “Chief Elements of Church Strength,” Essay delivered by Sumner B. Callaway before Minister’s Conference in Belton, Texas, April 2, 1885. J. M. Carroll Collection.

have enjoyed. I revered him as a teacher, I hung upon his words as a preacher, I have studied him as a theologian, have loved him as a friend, and venerated him as the greatest personality with whom I have ever been intimately associated.”⁸ Just as W. A. Criswell and the conservative resurgence of the 1970s and 1980s used Carroll for their own ends, so too did the clerical crusade of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries. After his death in 1914, partisans revisited and magnified Carroll’s life. He became an icon. Cranfill and others republished many of Carroll’s inspiring sermons. They immortalized him as “the colossus of Baptist history” and labeled him “the kingliest preacher.”⁹ They dwelled upon his exhortations to do the work of God on earth by serving as volunteers in a holy army. “Be humble before God,” Carroll had said, but “be as courageous as you please before men; fear them not.”¹⁰ He shepherded the infant clerical culture. More than any other figure, Carroll taught a generation of religious Texans to empower themselves by moving beyond traditional evangelistic concerns. He taught them to fight. And he led by example.

From his pulpit at the First Baptist Church of Waco, Benajah Harvey Carroll fashioned the elements for the clerical crusade. As early as the 1870s, before the turbulent decades of prohibition politics, Carroll engaged in moral warfare. Typical of the evolution from temperance to prohibition, Carroll began with his own congregation. He passed a series of temperance resolutions at First Baptist. The results encouraged his turn to moral reform. His church found itself united in righteousness. The *Texas Baptist and*

⁸ J. B. Cranfill, *Dr. J. B. Cranfill’s Chronicle: A Story of Life in Texas* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916), 317.

⁹ J. M. Carroll, *Dr. B.H. Carroll, the Colossus of Baptist History: Pastor, First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas and First President of S.W.B.T. Seminary* (Fort Worth, Tex.: J W Crowder, 1946); Cranfill, *Cranfill’s Chronicle*, 318.

¹⁰ B H Carroll, *Evangelistic Sermons*, ed. J. B. Cranfill (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1913), 161.

Herald reported that “The church in Waco is much stronger in its own self-respect, and has a much larger share of respect from the community, than before.” These were the essential ingredients for the coming clerical crusade. And the congregation loved him for supplying them. “No pastor in the State, probably,” the *Herald* reported, “has a stronger and more universal hold on the respect and affections of his people than Bro. Carroll.”¹¹ Carroll’s congregational work set the model for the following decades. He would set moral boundaries, place himself and any willing supporters on the right side, attack everything he imagined to be on the wrong side, and reap the benefits. As the years passed, Carroll’s scope expanded. What worked in his congregation, he realized, could work everywhere.

Carroll set his sights on the larger culture. Slowly freeing himself from traditional constraints, B. H. Carroll wrote in his personal notebook “I am a preacher, but I am none the less a citizen.” And being a citizen carried with it responsibilities, responsibilities not at odds with the pulpit. “My being a preacher,” he wrote, “does not seal my lips & paralyze my arm.”¹² Carroll and other clerics expanded their fields of labor. Although Carroll’s efforts in 1885 and 1887 collapsed under the weight of a hostile public, they also invigorated many within the churches. Moral reform supplied the remedy for their spiritual crisis.

The embattled victims of the spiritual crisis wanted a way out. They longed for respect and hungered for significance. The growth of clericalism depended upon it. Newly professionalized preachers fought for positions that satisfied their cravings. They wanted to matter. Methodist minister Samuel Blackwell, lobbying for a new appointment,

¹¹ Scrap, *Texas Baptist Herald*, January 8, 1874, B.H. Carroll Collection.

¹² B. H. Carroll, Personal Notebook of BH Carroll, B.H. Carroll Collection.

wanted “a place of consequence” and pled with elders to know “something of the standing I was to be accorded in the new field.”¹³ Any such office demanded high public standing. The culture of clericalism infused its communicants with want of respect. Baptist J.B. Cranfill’s remembrances teem with such concerns. From the time his father installed new metal bearings on his old-fashioned wagon to his brief tenure running a general store, Cranfill obsessed over “prestige” and his “standing in the community.”¹⁴ The respect accorded a preacher became the measure of godliness. Methodist George Rankin distinguished holy North Texas from pagan South Texas because, in the latter, preachers were “not generally respected.”¹⁵ The hunt for respect and authority pointed to an important milestone on the road to a culture of clericalism. Increasing memberships, growing churches, expanding denominations: such measures offered little shelter from the spiritual crisis. These were not enough for religious leaders intent on standing astride their broader culture and imposing their distinct vision of morality and righteousness upon it. Resources and membership rolls meant little; public consequence was to be the marker of clerical success. But how would religious Texans achieve these goals?

When Carroll first proposed his temperance resolutions in the 1870s, he noted with wonder that “never in Waco before was a community so interested in a church matter.” He could not help but notice that “the attendant congregation was very large.”¹⁶ Temperance, and later prohibition, could lure wayward Texans back to church. Those already there would find a spiritual confidence. When the resolutions passed, Carroll

¹³ Samuel H. Blackwell to Elijah L. Shettles, October 16, 1907. Elijah L. Shettles Papers, 1792-1940, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

¹⁴ Cranfill, *Cranfill’s Chronicle*, 32, 246, 266.

¹⁵ George C. Rankin, *The Story of My Life, or, More Than Half a Century as I Have Lived It and Seen It Lived* (Nashville: Smith & Lamar, 1912), 315.

¹⁶ Scrap, “Final Action of the First Baptist Church at Waco, on the Temperance Resolutions, as Published in the Herald.” B.H. Carroll Collection.

noted the unprecedented “manifestations of sublime Christianity.” At once, Carroll and his congregation found themselves perfectly “in harmony with the principles of Christianity.”¹⁷ Such utter satisfaction proved impossible to ignore. But the turn to a larger movement not only represented a transformative shift in the religious history of the South, it transformed the future of American history.

Whether targeting a local saloon or promoting a constitutional amendment, the religious push for prohibition in the South represented a departure from historical patterns and signaled a new era in southern religion. For generations, southern evangelicals lived in moral isolation from the world. As Ted Ownby put it, the southern church “kept itself pure and left the rest of the world to its hellish ways.”¹⁸ Denominations disciplined their own members (always a minority of the population) for various improprieties but never felt obligated or entitled to address the lives of nonmembers. They certainly never relied upon governments or laws. Gaines Foster called this the “antebellum moral polity”: a system built upon voluntarism and moral suasion, not coercion.¹⁹ Prohibition and the turn to moral reform undid all of that. The tenuous ceasefire between the sacred and the secular collapsed. Coexistence ceased. Moral warriors believed that secular sins had breached religious barriers to besiege the righteous and had to be destroyed. Moral warriors sallied forth into the world to do battle.

Although prohibition accounted for the majority of energy expended in the moral crusades, evangelicals never limited themselves to liquor and saloons. At various times and with varying intensities they targeted prostitution, gambling, theaters, the circus,

¹⁷ “Final Action,” B.H. Carroll Collection.

¹⁸ Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 208.

¹⁹ Gaines Foster, *Moral Reconstruction, Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 9-26.

Sabbath-breaking, lotteries, obscenity, tobacco, Sunday recreation, dancing, cards, animal fighting, boxing, baseball, and a host of other concerns. Although critics claimed otherwise, the alarms raised against these and other amusements were never cynical or calculated, or even illogical. The years after Reconstruction witnessed the rapid rise in popular amusements and popular culture. The rise of cities, mass transportation, and mass media all conspired to bring amusements to the masses. Their meteoric rise challenged the evangelicals' carefully constructed insular world. Ted Ownby's *Subduing Satan* best captures the menacing look of recreation and amusement to evangelical eyes. In many ways, amusements were simply competition. They played baseball on Sunday. But the campaigns against sin and amusement were always about something else, something more. Theaters and saloons encouraged an ethic at odds with the culture of evangelical religion. Drinking and dancing indulged a narrow-minded self-indulgence. Professional sports and other diversions "demonstrated the animal-like qualities of men."²⁰ Taken together, the world of saloons and drinking and sports and gambling and dancing affronted the churches. It captured all the worst of the world. At a moment when the religious world felt besieged, on came the saloon to embody all of the soul-destroying sins of the secular world. When young preachers arrived at new charges eager to save souls, the temples of sin and iniquity confronted them instead. Such was the case of the young Methodist C.N. Morton, newly arrived in the lumber town of Caro. Norton found a sluggish congregation and a booming skating rink. But while moral crusades reacted to the advancing world of recreation and amusement, they originated in a shifting religious world of denominations and professionalization.

²⁰ Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 50.

Just as evangelical denominations homogenized after the Civil War, they expanded in scope and scale. A variety of organizational expansions and innovations offered a new route of ambition for the clerical pursuit of power and prestige. They opened all the avenues to modern professional advancement. Ambitious, striving men suddenly had the ability to exert themselves. Ultimately, as they empowered themselves and their denominations, they found the means to lever their religion against the world. Organizational expansion accompanied the creation of the clerical culture and, in many ways, provided for it. This vast and sweeping structural change undergirded so much of the religious politics that followed. The story's details changed from locale to locale, but in its broad outlines the Texas chapter shares the regional and national story: evangelical religion emerged from small and independent rural congregations with part-time pastors into an immense and ordered bureaucracy led by religious professionals in wealthier, urban pulpits. This transformation reordered Texas religion.

At the precise moment religious Texans lamented the spiritual torpor of the times, their churches brimmed with new members. In the closing years of the nineteenth-century, Baylor University's aging shepherd Rufus Burleson reflected on his denomination's phenomenal expansion. "I have seen the little band of 1900 Baptists become a grand army of nearly 300,000," he proudly proclaimed. The other dominant Texas evangelical denomination, the Methodists, celebrated the same. One Methodist minister wrote that "we are in the midst of an era of Church Building – the greatest ever known in our history."²¹ Another reported that even the smaller Texas churches, particularly the Presbyterians and the holiness denominations, were funneling members into churches. But expansion meant more than memberships. It meant the whole

²¹ W. F. McMurry to Elijah L. Shettles, April 16, 1907. Elijah L. Shettles Papers.

apparatus of religious power, institutionalized in the denomination. Long recognized as a crucial chapter in the history of southern religion, but best captured by what historian Beth Schweiger recently called “the gospel working up,” southern churches graduated from rural localism.²² Although religious Texans worried about the corruptions of the modern world, they willingly employed modern means to pursue their ambitions. The denomination offered the most immediate avenue. Through schools, publications, and the denominational hierarchy, striving religious leaders institutionalized the imperatives of the clerical culture.

As early as the 1880s, denominational leaders recognized the power and influence of education. Ultimately a soft and sporadic prelude to larger political battles, educational concerns nevertheless proved an early and recurrent site of struggle and self-assertion for religious leaders.²³ Educational commitments united religious Texans without the rancor and controversy of politics.

Throughout late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, religious Texans never shied from their faith in religious education. They lauded the schools as sites of religious evangelism. They paid dividends. The denominational secondary school, school-builder and Methodist Bishop Edwin Mouzon said in 1913, “creates its own patronage in a large measure. It brings Christian education with its lofty ideals to boys and girls who, without it would never have come under their power.”²⁴ Baptist educator J. M. Carroll agreed:

²² See Schweiger, *Gospel Working Up*.

²³ James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), describes education as the way station to larger religious activism. Charles Israel integrates the two in his *Before Scopes: Evangelicalism, Education, and Evolution in Tennessee, 1870-1925* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

²⁴ *Texas Christian Advocate*, October 23, 1913.

“Whoever awakens, develops & directs the ambition gets the child.”²⁵ Leaders praised Christian education for creating Christian believers and inculcating Christian values. It was no surprise, then, that the expansion of secular public schools and the establishment of a secular public university unsettled many.

Conflicts with the Texas State Board of Education are not confined to the twenty-first century. In 1881, Methodists from the East Texas Conference joined their evangelical brethren in condemning new standards that cut off public funds to schools with opening or closing prayers or scripture reading. The Methodists said the Board “pandered to the infidel, the atheist, the dregs of society.” One schoolmaster urged that “Texas, with all the wealth of her present and the promise of her future, be not bound to the destroying wheels of infidelity and sin.”²⁶ The statues wound their way through the courts and formed a part of the brewing clerical crusade. But no issue inflamed the churches more than the establishment of the University of Texas in 1883. It was too much for some religious Texans. Formerly humble church leaders lashed out against public education.

Baptist J.M. Carroll, B. H. Carroll’s brother, declared “all education incomplete, onesided & hurtful without Christian education [SIC].”²⁷ Echoing a common refrain, Baptist Rufus Burleson, president of the denominational Waco University,²⁸ decried the state’s embrace of public schools. He claimed the system was “being manipulated by Infidels & Godless men for the ruin of our Children & Texas.” In many parts of Texas, he

²⁵ J. M. Carroll, “Our School and its Part in the Greater Awakening of Our People & the Further Upbuilding of Our Cause.” Lecture Notes, n.d. J.M. Carroll Collection.

²⁶ *Texas Christian Advocate*, July 16, 1881.

²⁷ J. M. Carroll, “Christian Education: It’s Importance and Necessity,” Lecture Notes, n.d. J.M. Carroll Collection.

²⁸ During these years, Texas claimed two major Baptist colleges: Baylor University in Independence, and Waco University in Waco. The two schools consolidated after 1885-6 formation of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and became Baylor University in Waco.

wrote, educators disregarded the Bible and schools disallowed prayer. Christian taxpayers, Burleson said, supported a system that was “prayerless, Christless, and Godless.” He called it “mournful & appalling” and pled for all good Christians “to rescue our Grand system of public education from Infidels & wicked & narrow-minded men.”²⁹ William Carey Crane, Burleson’s counterpart at Baylor University in Independence, particularly resented the establishment of the University of Texas. He called the inevitable institutionalization of “rationalism” as “a blow at faith” that “aims to undermine all religion and the Christian religion especially.”³⁰ Both Crane and Burleson, prominent nineteenth-century denominational leaders, shied from politics—except for education. Recognizing that the competition for souls arose from external forces, they sought to rescue “youth just emerging from its swaddling cloths and stretching out its free arms.”³¹ The same general sentiment later lured the full weight of the churches into the prohibition battle. For now, however, education bridged the gap between the anticlerical church leaders of the nineteenth century and the clerical champions of the twentieth. It was no accident, for instance, that the first Texas cleric, B.H. Carroll, said “the school room is the battle-field.”³² But education, though it lingered long after prohibition as an essential element of political Christianity, never conjured the same vivid fears as saloons and liquor dealers. But they united evangelicals against the public sphere and conveyed the urgency of organizing against the hostile influences of the world. Opposition to public schooling fueled the expansion of Sunday schools and the building of denominational

²⁹ Rufus Burleson and T. E. Muse, “SCHOOLS & EDUCATION,” undated manuscript, Rufus Columbus Burleson Papers, The Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

³⁰ William Carey Crane, “Should the Higher Education of Youth be Committed to the State?” undated manuscript, Crane Papers.

³¹ Crane, “Higher Education,” Crane Papers

³² B. H. Carroll, *Christian Education: a Sermon Preached at San Antonio, Texas, Sunday, January 28, 1900* (Waco: Kellner Printing Company, 1900). B. H. Carroll Collection.

colleges. These institutions incubated a growing clerical caste and were sited as outposts for the dissemination of Christian values in the broader population.

Denominations expanded their educational programs. They focused especially on secondary education. The late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth centuries became the era of the denominational college. The struggling Baylor University at Independence merged with Waco University on its way to becoming the largest Baptist university in the world. The Methodists founded Southern Methodist University in Dallas in 1911, fulfilling Rev. Nathan Powell's dream of launching "something big."³³ The Christian Church took control of Add-Ran College in 1889, slowly grew the school, and by 1911 relocated to a new Fort Worth campus, rechristened the school as Texas Christian University, and established a sizable endowment.³⁴ A host of smaller denominational schools supplemented these flagships with campuses across the state. Meanwhile, new theological schools produced new professional clergymen. The Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary opened in 1902. Southern Methodist University established its own seminary, the official theological school for all Southern Methodist Conferences west of the Mississippi.³⁵ In a shrewd bureaucratic maneuver, the ubiquitous B.H. Carroll founded Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1908 and it emerged to become one of the largest seminaries in the world.³⁶ Each of these schools endowed the leaders of the clerical crusade. From lofty perches, ensconced in respectability and freed from the petty minutiae of congregational life, academic churchmen found an institutional base for

³³ J. L. Massey, to Rev. Nathan Powell, February 13, 1913. Shettles Papers.

³⁴ See Jerome A. Moore, *Texas Christian University: A Hundred Years of History* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1974).

³⁵ See Marshall Terry, *"From High on the Hilltop ...": A Brief History of SMU* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993).

³⁶ See Alan J. Lefever, *Fighting the Good Fight: The Life and Work of Benajah Harvey Carroll* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1994), 98-117.

the culture of clericalism. J.M. Carroll declared denominational schools vital to “the greater awakening of our people & the further upbuilding of our cause.”³⁷ If the world pushed against them, their schools could push back. The denomination could counter apathetic homes and hostile publics. It opened religious Texans to the possibilities of their denominations, to the value of concerted and organized efforts in pursuit of religious empowerment. Christian education boomed.

The triumph of clericalism, however, was as much a victory of ideas as it was of politics or organization. Before they ever won political battles, the clerics waged and won wars over history, government, and theology. Each of those intellectual struggles was fought with weapons forged by the denominations. The denominational paper, the religious history, the clerical autobiography, and the printed sermon all magnified the clerical voice. Denominational publishing fueled the clerical insurgency.

James Cranfill recalled an illustrative story from his youth, the tale of “the apostasy of Cousin Sam.” Cousin Sam, Cranfill wrote, “by all human environments and training, should have been a Baptist.” Cranfill’s whole family was Baptist. Their acquaintances were Baptist. Cousin Sam *should* have been Baptist. But he was a Methodist. Sam’s father (Cranfill’s uncle) once met the famed Methodist preacher Lorenzo Dow and, impressed, subscribed to a paper he edited. “At an impressionable age,” Cousin Sam read the editions scattered around the home and was converted. “The paper made him a Methodist,” Cranfill said. “The only Methodist Cranfill I have ever known,” J.B. wrote, served as an “object lesson” in the power of the denominational press. It made J.B. “a persistent friend of Baptist and Christian literature.” Clerics

³⁷ Carroll, “Our School and Its Part,” J.M. Carroll Collection.

appreciated the power of the press. Cranfill put it plainly: “The man who writes the books and edits the papers of a people is the influential man.”³⁸

Cranfill spoke from experience. In the early years of prohibition agitation, Cranfill edited the *Advance*, first in Gatesville and then in Waco. He supplied a growing subscription base with weekly articles and editorials decrying the evils of liquor. Following the *Advance*’s success, Cranfill purchased the fledgling *Western Baptist*, rechristened it the *Texas Baptist Standard*, and steered it away from a limited readership and near bankruptcy. Through shrewd maneuvering, Cranfill crushed Samuel Hayden’s rival *Texas Baptist and Herald*. By 1894 the *Standard* claimed eighteen thousand subscribers. A decade later, in 1904, thirty thousand. The paper was valued at more than twenty-five thousand dollars.³⁹ It had an unquantifiable quality, as well: it wielded influence.

For sheer impact, nothing in Cranfill’s life ever matched editorial control of the *Standard*. As far as “usefulness in the production of work of enduring value,” Cranfill said, no other positions “carry with me a feather’s weight.”⁴⁰ He called it “the happiest and most useful of my life’s work.” In 1904 he cashed out and pocketed a small fortune. Although he never lamented his riches, he forever regretted relinquishing “the greatest throne of power and service with which my life has ever been blessed.”⁴¹ Cranfill wasn’t wrong. His experience at the *Standard*, and the experience of his counterparts at the other state papers, illustrated the power of the denominational newspaper in shaping the culture of religious Texans.

³⁸ Cranfill, *Cranfill’s Chronicle*, 161-2.

³⁹ Cranfill, *Cranfill’s Chronicle*, 429, 452.

⁴⁰ Cranfill, *Cranfill’s Chronicle*, 459.

⁴¹ Cranfill, *Cranfill’s Chronicle*, 465.

Denominational newspapers glued scattered denominational worlds together. By the turn of the century, all major state denominations joined their various news outlets under single statewide publications. All across Texas, religious readers consumed the same news, the same editorials, and the same emerging vision of the world. No other forum united Texas churches so effectively. Annual meetings and interpersonal correspondence offered only fleeting bonds—the paper bound the state denominations together each week.

The men behind these papers grew to become giants. Cranfill, his successor James Bruton Gambrell, and their Methodist counterpart, the wrangling, rambunctious George Rankin, all achieved unprecedented influence. If the heads of denominational colleges shaped the minds of their students, religious editors reached their entire denomination. Notable articles even filtered into the state press. No other religious office reached into more homes. Never before had a handful of religious Texans spoken with such amplified voices. From their lofty perches, they broadcast the clerical culture across all of Texas. They became the state's most powerful religious figures. And to a man they all encouraged the coming crusade.

Religious publications, of course, were never limited to newspapers. Denominations produced a bumper crop of biographies, histories, and theologies. Professional clergymen, reared in theological schools and freed from second jobs, devoted themselves to reading and writing. A growing audience harvested the memories of the old timers, the opinions of the firebrands, and the myths of the hagiographers. Religious activists looking for sanction found it in the empowering literature of their peers. Nostalgic histories and biographies (and, as testament to the clerics' self-

importance, auto-biographies) gave anxious religious Texans a raw but noble tradition of perseverance, righteousness, and activism.⁴² Thriving publishing houses, such as the Methodists' branch of Smith & Lamar in Dallas, flooded the market with religious literature. Suddenly readers everywhere could consume the tales of the pioneering preachers or the invigorating Sunday sermons of clerical champions. Clerical leaders, such as the Methodist Bishop Edwin Mouzon, published dozens of books in their lifetimes. A typical leader in the clerical movement exhibited an erudition at odds with the stereotype of rural hicks and irrational mystics. As the clerical culture spread, clerics integrated the religious scholar into their growing movement. Methodist C. C. Cody, dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Southwestern University, in Georgetown, worked upon a grand history of the state's Methodists and believed, he told a clerical ally, that "the sooner it is done the better it will be for Texas Methodism."⁴³ As went history, so went the denomination.

Religious authority migrated from the pulpit to the pen over the course of the nineteenth century. Texas denominations constructed efficient educational and literary noise-making machines. They amplified the religious voice above the din of anticlericalism. They unleashed a torrent of noise across the entire state. While sympathetic church members reveled in a sacred symphony, anticlerics denounced a cacophony. But they all heard something. Denominations had created the means to reach beyond their narrow church fiefdoms to encompass all of the state. From this base religious champions foisted their distinct visions of religion, politics, and history on the whole culture. None of it, however, could have occurred without the denomination itself.

⁴² For the industry of evangelical nostalgia, see especially Schweiger, *Gospel Working Up*, 174, 196.

⁴³ C. C. Cody to Elijah L. Shettles, March 10, 1911, Elijah L. Shettles Papers.

The congregation oriented religious life before the Civil War. Everything revolved around the single sovereign church. Evangelicals jealously guarded their independence and spurned the rigid strictures of organizational domination. They believed “churchianity” sapped spiritual vigor and poisoned the old and stale churches decaying all along the eastern seaboard. The Baptists, for instance, sent “messengers,” not delegates, to associational meetings and general conventions.⁴⁴ Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, lured by respectability and compelled by the age’s revolutions in organization, denominational superstructures arose to reorient church life away from local congregations. Once afterthoughts, evangelical denominations became actors in the ongoing drama of American religion. They emerged from obscurity, mobilized a vast and modern bureaucracy, and wrenched authority away from local institutions. After the Civil War, the denomination offered an immediate path to prestige and power. Ambition, a key ingredient of the clerical culture, first manifested itself here, in the organizational world of evangelical religion.

The denominational boom sparked a bonanza. New organizational structures offered a multitude of roles and positions for ambitious religious strivers. No sooner did the denominational “working up” invigorate clerics than it plunged them into competition. Teeming pools of petty politicking and rival ambition collected. Far from the eye of the pews, would-be religious lords intrigued and maneuvered. Theirs was not a monkish devotion to uninhibited cooperation and unity of purpose, but a cutthroat world

⁴⁴ For the majority of the nineteenth century, these bodies only formally existed in those fleeting moments when messengers met and reported. During the 1890s, clerical leaders reinterpreted several of these notions in the Baptist General Convention and maneuvered to grant the body a more permanent and coercive influence. See especially B. F. Riley, *History of the Baptists of Texas: A Concise Narrative of the Baptist Denomination in Texas, from the Earliest Occupation of the Territory to the Close of the Year 1906* (Dallas: B. F. Riley, 1907), 372

of jealousy and court life. These were professional go-getters. Their bureaucracy proved little different from the corporate life arising all across the country. An eminent public relations expert reminded Dallas readers that “churches are business institutions” and preachers were professionals. He believed “every minister should be trained to business,” should earn their position just “as the bookkeeper earns his right to keep books, as the doctor earns his right to practice, and as the salesman earns his right to represent his goods.”⁴⁵ Religion was a business, and business was booming.

The denominations elevated the ambitious. As a boy on his Central Texas ranch, J. B. Cranfill remembered listening to the electric music of “the old frontier telegraph line.” As the wires ferried their many unknown messages, Cranfill marveled at them all. Whether conveying personal sentiments or worldly business, at ten cents a word he knew they counted for something in the world. He conferred gravity upon them. They *mattered*. And he wanted to matter. Cranfill quietly resolved, not knowing how and perhaps hardly knowing why, to one day traffic in such weighty words. A generation joined him.

Cranfill’s own creation myth had his mother prophesying her son’s worldly worth. She prayed, Cranfill said, “She called my name, she pleaded with God to have mercy upon her boy, to make him a good man, to cause his life to be a blessing to the world.”⁴⁶ A generation of religious Texans, similarly hoping to bless the world, could suddenly expect to make their mark on the world from within the denomination. High church offices magnified the men who held them. They became a place for strivers, an outlet for the go-getters. The rigid competition ensconced the most ambitious in positions

⁴⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, June 10, 1906.

⁴⁶ Cranfill, *Cranfill’s Chronicle*, 21

of great influence, but the competition stirred up strife, culled the humble, and upset religious harmony.

The bitter contest for advancement played out most vividly among Texas Methodists, the most extensive evangelical denomination in Texas that empowered its denominational bureaucracy to direct careers and decided appointments. Elijah Shettles, a reformed drunkard, dedicated bibliophile, and committed prohibitionist, served briefly as a presiding elder for a series of circuits in north-central Texas during the early-twentieth century. His brief tenure awoke him to the ugly reality of church appointments.

C. E. Simpson languished several years on rural circuits before departing for another conference. “I loved the old Texas Conference as can never love another,” he assured his elder, Elijah Shettles. “Fourteen years of my best life and blood was cheerfully given to her,” he said, and for his toil he had bounced from circuit to circuit. He had moved sideways in the church hierarchy. “If I had had any encouragement I never would [have] transferred,” he explained, “but I can’t help but feel that I was not appreciated.” Simpson, of course, flirting with an ambition and sensitivity perhaps unseemly in a pronounced man of God, renounced any delusions. “I don’t mean to convey the idea that I think I am a great preacher,” he said, and assured Shettles that “I know I am not. I know it as well or better than any one else.” Ambition only accounted for half of Simpson’s lament. As his career stalled, pride and grievance exacerbated his misfortune. “The thing that hurt me most was to see others that were no better preacher than I, and had not done any more for the church than I had done, promoted and I was left to take what remained after the others had been provided for.” Simpson complained of

cliques and favoritism and, when he lost the game, complained about the rules.⁴⁷ Simpson was not alone. What ate away at him ate away at others.

“I am just about as much disgusted as I ever was in my life,” wrote the pastor of Marlin’s First Methodist Church, I. F. Betts, upon hearing of a colleague’s transfer. “It is the same old song: the bishop has fallen into the hands of the politicians.”⁴⁸ Another minister vented the same frustrations. Samuel Blackwell, a Methodist minister, lobbied Shettles for a favorable appointment in his conference. “I have been in the itinerancy of grace,” he wrote. “I have served hard circuits and have worked and toiled in season and out of season.” He had slowly advanced in his home conference and now held “a good station,” but cliques conspired against him. “This is my 9th year,” he wrote, “and I have had no “friends at Court” to “boost” my case.”⁴⁹ He hoped Shettles could transcend the profession’s pettiness, but it too tinged Shettles with ugly corruptions.

Sometime before 1905, G. E. Cameron completed his second year as station preacher in Henderson. He reported regular growth and took pride that “my people want me back.” He expected a third year in Henderson. He was reassigned, however, “to almost no appointment.” He accused two elders, Elijah Shettles and C. R. Lamar, of conspiring to remove him from Henderson to make room for an acquaintance of theirs. “I have felt just as I use to when a boy and a larger boy would impose on me just because he could and had the advantage,” Cameron wrote. He called his elder a “political trickster” who “would kill anybody to care for himself and his cherished friend.” Cameron converted souls and built up the church. He believed he had earned a renewal or a better appointment. Instead he found himself outmaneuvered. When Shettles received

⁴⁷ C.E. Simpson to Elijah L. Shettles, October 21, 1907. Shettles Papers.

⁴⁸ I. F. Betts to Elijah L. Shettles, November 23, 1910. Shettles Papers

⁴⁹ Samuel H. Blackwell to Elijah L. Shettles, October 16, 1907. Shettles Papers.

Cameron's complaint, he deflected the criticism and hoped Cameron would take the "joy that comes from a consciousness of duty faithfully performed."⁵⁰ Few surrendered to such satisfactions.

Many passed-over preachers questioned the politics of their profession. The constant striving disenchanted the losers and the languishers. Those who clung to tradition decayed on the margins. But the profession's politics left the most ambitious in positions of authority. The inevitable consequences of professionalization burdened religious leadership with perhaps unseemly vanities. It infected every level of the hierarchy with resentments. And if local preachers gave themselves over, so too did elders and bishops.

Annual and general meetings played out like political conventions. Amid the business of religion, attendees sowed suspicions, traded favors, and glad-handed for delegates. When Bishop Seth Ward died in 1909, speculation and rumor shot through the state's professional Methodists. The phrase "I hear" commonly prefaced some worried speculation that a faction or clique stood ready to overtake the proceedings and elect a particular slate of candidates. Referring to some unknown cabal, I. Z. T. Morris decried an upcoming general conference in 1910. "I hear that they are combining delegates from Texas and they are going to stand united ... they are going over there to take everything in sight."⁵¹ C. A. Tower feared the elderly Bishop Joseph Key would use the vacuum to reap a whirlwind among the emerging clerics. "I have it on good authority," he wrote, "that he is going to reinstate the old regime in our Conference." He warned his fellow presiding elder Elijah Shettles. "I hear," he wrote, "that Bishop Key intends to bring on a

⁵⁰ G. E. Cameron to Chas F. Smith, August 6, 1905, August 24, 1905. Shettles Papers.

⁵¹ I. Z. T. Morris, to Elijah L. Shettles, January 8, 1910. Shettles Papers.

cyclone among the elders.” He fretted: he, Shettles, and all the young striving blood in the Conference could be finished. Luckily, they survived. Most did.⁵²

During the first decade of the twentieth century, George Rankin established himself as the leading prohibitionist among Texas Methodists. He also fought the hardest for denominational advancement. At the same convention, Rankin made a power play for a bishop’s office. Word spread. Many feared Rankin could wrangle enough delegates to dominate the convention. Jesse Lee, a country pastor, said “Rankin is mixed up with petty politicks; and [referring to Joe Bailey, the controversial political kingmaker of Texas] has played the game with a Joe Baily [sic] hand”. Wary Methodists believed, if he won enough support, Rankin could become a Bishop. “There could be no greater calamity [sic],” Lee warned, and, revealing the jealousies and struggles rife in the conference, said “woe-betide some of us fellows that have not bowed at his shrine.”⁵³ When Edwin Mouzon ascended to the office as a compromise candidate, a wave of relief swept over Rankin’s opponents. Suddenly the petty politics of men became divine planning. “God was in it all,” Jesse Lee said. I. Z. T. Morris added that “I regard it as one of the greatest demonstrations of the hand of God in the management of the affairs of the church as I ever saw.” It was a rare rebuff to a leading cleric. Such setbacks were few.

Although he failed in his quest to become bishop, George Rankin knew plenty of denominational success. And so he also knew the attendant jealousies of religious rivals. After several successful church-building and sin-fighting stints in Kansas City and Houston, Rankin won appointment to one of the state’s most prestigious pulpits: First Methodist Church of Dallas. When introduced to the members of the North Texas

⁵² C. A. Tower to Elijah L. Shettles, November 18, 1909. Shettles Papers.

⁵³ Jesse Lee to Elijah L. Shettles, May 13, 1910. Shettles Papers.

Conference, Rankin recalled his chilly reception: “Individually many of the members of the conference extended to me a cordial welcome to their fellowship, but generally speaking my reception was a trifle cool and formal. As a body they were not prepared to accept me with open arms.” When he asked why, Rankin reported a fellow minister responding “Why should I thus welcome you to our conference and to the first appointment in it, when you know as well as I do that I ought to be in that pulpit myself!” Rankin knew then the consequences of the hyper-competitive world of the striving clergymen. “Transfers for the leading appointments in the conference were not overwhelmingly popular in those days,” he concluded simply.⁵⁴

Amid this competitive frenzy, religious strivers utilized all possible means of self-promotion. While personal connections and denominational politicking greased the wheels of advancement, the engine remained church growth: increased members, upgraded buildings, and surging funds. The expansion of the denominations burdened upwardly mobile religious leaders with expectations of constant growth. If ministers still claimed to preach “the old-time gospel,” the most successful incorporated new-time methods of organization and management. In 1907, referring to a recent transfer, Methodist Bishop E.D. Mouzon laid bare what the twentieth-century denomination valued most: “Johnson [the transfer] is a fine man, fine mixer, good preacher, good money-getter. Fact is it was his success as a money-getter that led to his transfer. He did so well at Coronal [Institute], raising about \$33,000 last year that Southwestern wanted him.”⁵⁵ Mouzon spoke more like an organization man than a spiritual shepherd because, in many ways, he was. The new religious order rewarded the church-builder rather than

⁵⁴ Rankin, *The Story of My Life*, 340-342.

⁵⁵ Edwin D. Mouzon to Elijah L. Shettles, November 14, 1907. Shettles Papers.

the soul-saver. And, in return, the church-builder expected steady advancement through increasingly prestigious (and well-paying) appointments. The Baptist J. B. Cranfill heaped praise upon a colleague, John Boyet, of Honey Grove: “He has had few equals in the Texas Baptist pulpit,” Cranfill wrote, and yet he remained in an otherwise small and insignificant pulpit. “I have often wondered why Boyet did not bloom out in to a metropolitan pastorate,” he wrote.⁵⁶ That a great preacher should languish in a small hamlet puzzled Cranfill the same as it would have puzzled any turn-of-the-century preacher. Such was the established pattern. The exception proved the rule.

A striving preacher expected to travel the path from small and insignificant rural pastorates to large and influential urban “first churches.” Benajah Harvey Carroll, “the colossus of Baptist History,” presided over Waco’s First Baptist. George Rankin, the prototypical political preacher, presided over Dallas’s First Methodist. Soon, J. Frank Norris would preside over Fort Worth’s First Baptist (and be able to boast that it was the largest church in the United States⁵⁷—not the last time Texas would claim the distinction) and George Truett would pastor Dallas’s First Baptist. But the denomination opened other paths as well. Carroll’s self-pronounced protégé James B. Cranfill, only intermittently a preacher, presided over *The Baptist Standard* and exercised considerable influence. Meanwhile, at the denominational colleges, men such as Rufus Burleson held sway over an intellectual realm seeping ever more into the daily life of the denominations.

The logic of denominational growth reaped a harvest of ambitious leaders. The maze of advancement stranded weak leaders, advanced the strongest, and furnished them

⁵⁶ Cranfill, *Cranfill’s Chronicle*, 363-4.

⁵⁷ See Barry Hankins, *God’s Rascal: J. Frank Norris & the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 124.

with the tools of influence. Before looking outside for the origins of the Bible Belt, the striving world inside the denomination laid them bare. It revealed the new ethos of advancement, the do-whatever-it-takes-to-triumph creed of a new generation. It unleashed bitter in-fighting and strong egos, but it furnished religion with movement. No longer the sin of self-indulgence, ambition reined. The sum of these developments reoriented how religious leaders should conduct themselves. A preacher was no longer only a preacher, he was an organization man, an editor, a publisher, a striver, an organizer. He was a well-oiled machine of advancement. He would take the churches with him.

As Beth Schweiger discovered with Virginia Baptists and Methodists, when denominations matured, their leaders found themselves leading massive organizations flush with social capital but without real authority or influence in public affairs.⁵⁸ So they leveraged their assets. They exerted their weight. They exercised all the latent power of their organizational triumphs. But the world of the denomination and the world of public life were never distinct, least of all in the lives of religious leaders. The building up of denominations and influence in secular affairs never occurred in easy succession; they enveloped one another and grew apace. Clerics just as often interjected themselves into public life to bolster their influence in their denomination. The denomination was no monolith; it was only a patchwork of persons holding conflicting motivations and achieving varying levels of success. What thrust many *into* the denominations often thrust them *out* into the world: they were connected. As the case of George Rankin demonstrates, success in the denomination meant success in the world. The striving, ambitious man worked in the world of the secular and in the world of the sacred all at

⁵⁸ See Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*.

once. The denomination rose in concert with the reformer. The best reformers were the best denominational workers. The religious editors were the most vocal in politics. Men like Rankin and Carroll, at the best appointments, were the clerics *par excellence*. They traveled along the same twinned paths of worldly activism and denominational success. The strivers knew that crusading helped them at court. They even found that reform sparked excitement and glued congregations together, sometimes superseding the need for such sordid maneuvering. They built up churches—and their reputations—by rallying around the cross and rallying *against* moral evils. Moral reform took hold. What better way to build an enemy? What better way to invigorate a crisis-infected church? And so, in concert with the gospel working up, the gospel worked out.

In pursuit of moral reform, denominational risers channeled their ambitions outward. The great crusades glued together bishops, deacons, elders, lay leaders, pew-sitters, and even wayward Christians into a single monument to righteousness. Professional competitors set aside their petty grievances and engaged a common enemy. They declared war on the world. In 1924, H. L. Mencken first stumbled upon what he called “the Bible Belt.” In typical fashion he scorned the rising intensity of the region’s religion. But he made an astute observation. He noted that evangelical Christians were itching for a fight. “What they long for,” Mencken wrote, “is a bomb.” Little did he know, they were already building one.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ H. L. Mencken, “Editorial,” *American Mercury*, November, 1924.

CHAPTER FIVE

Triumph in the Churches: The Clerical Insurgency

Decades of denominational construction and consolidation transformed Texas religion. Churches grew, ambition flourished, money flowed, and religious colleges and newspapers abounded. The raw materials of the Bible Belt were assembled. Now it needed builders. The great denominational bureaucracies were not ends, but means. The culture of clericalism depended upon them, grew from them, but still it needed to be articulated and disseminated. This project consumed the energy of denominational leaders. The postwar spiritual crisis still raged in the anxious hearts of Texas Christians. Languid convictions still scandalized the clergy. Christians had to be roused from their idleness and despair.

Activists incited their brethren to act. Congregations needed assurance. “We do not stand in need so much of men and influence and money as we do of conviction that our enterprises are of God,” the *Baptist Standard* declared.¹ Talented clergy filled the pulpits, money flowed into the denominations, educational and journalistic endeavors boomed. But to what ends? Church members stood still, and in a fragile spiritual world, idleness wrought disaster. “You need to do something to stir the people out of their inaction,” Methodist Bishop Edwin Mouzon urged one of his presiding elders, Elijah Shettles, early in 1912. “Anything is better than stagnation.”² If activists didn’t keep

¹ *Baptist Standard*, March 17, 1892.

² Edwin D. Mouzon to Elijah L. Shettles, February 22, 2012. Elijah L. Shettles Papers, 1792-1940, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

moving they would disappear, would be passed by and forgotten. They would decay, alone in their denominational towers.

In 1909, Methodist pastor TM Brownlee arrived in Kosse, Texas, to find his congregation immobilized and indolent. “I don’t think I ever saw a people more satisfied at doing nothing than the people here,” he wrote. “They have tried to do nothing [for] so long [that] they actually believe that they can’t do any thing and do not desire to do any thing.” Void of ambition or aspiration, “they think they are too weak to even exist,” Brownlee said. Among clerical activists, action defined religious health, and the Kosse Methodist Church appeared ill. Brownlee prescribed all of the regular clerical remedies to rouse the congregation. “Since studying the conditions and getting an insight into the real needs and demands within the bounds of this Charge,” he wrote, “I felt like I ought to write a book, edit a paper, build a Church, repair another, organize a League, preach on Infant Baptism, make about five hundred visits, and a thousand other things which I will not now mention, in order to awaken interest and arouse [*sic*] the Church to doing something.” No word of preaching the old-time religion, no word on “Christ and Him crucified.” The modern preacher now drew upon a hundred practical, proactive plans from the clerical handbook: publishing, church-building, and organizing. If he didn’t lead the faithful, and they didn’t follow, the church would collapse. The modern age demanded constant agitation. Stillness meant death. “We have simply got to do something,” Brownlee said, “or we are gone.” He had learned the lessons of the spiritual crisis. He had imbibed the culture of clericalism. Now he had to share it with the world.³

As the culture of clericalism invigorated the denominations, it roused and empowered their chief agents, the ministers. The crisis-ridden neurasthenic of the

³ T. M. Brownlee to Elijah L. Shettles, February 3, 1909. Shettles Papers.

nineteenth century yielded to the proud warrior of the twentieth. Freed from secondary work and flush with large audiences and great resources, the minister's great potential for good beckoned the activist. The pioneering ad man, Nathaniel C. Fowler Jr., marveled at the preacher's many advantages. In the daily press, Fowler extolled the latent power of the office and urged the minister to exert himself on the world. He believed they were uniquely positioned, and uniquely burdened, to conquer the secular sphere. The preacher, he wrote, bore "the responsibilities of eternal consequence." Fowler joined in the clerical chorus. To shy from the times and abdicate one's duty, he claimed, "is the greatest menace to society." "The church today," he wrote, "needs the aggressive Christian, the man with physical and mental power, the man who can strike a physical as well as a mental blow for good."⁴

Clerical ministers claimed a dignity and a worth unmatched in the secular world. But in a hostile culture, it had to be defended. Once a controversial pioneer of the clerical culture, B.H. Carroll had become a lion, a man followed and loved and emulated. At the 1898 Baptist state general convention, Carroll inspired a now-eager audience to follow his lead. In a sermon entitled "An Office Magnified,"⁵ Carroll called for the preachers' explicit empowerment. "The office of a minister must be magnified," he said, "glorified always, everywhere, and by all incumbents." Doctors healed the sick, teachers taught youth, and police maintained order, yet no position in society matched the ministers' holy charge: the clergyman's "trust is sacred and God himself confers it." Building from that simple premise, Carroll pushed for "a profound realization of its importance." He called for his listeners to realize the power of their office "by giving yourself wholly to it."

⁴ *Dallas Morning News* June 10, 1906.

⁵ Taken from Romans 11:13: "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office."

Then, in the soon-to-become ubiquitous martial language, Carroll roused his audience to action: “Let every watchman blow his trumpet at the coming of the sword. Let every sentinel cry out on his post: ‘To arms! They come! The foe—the foe!’”⁶ The preacher held the keys to heaven, but now his work was the world. His range of action was unlimited.

Clerical encouragements reverberated across the state. The call to arms sounded from nearly every pulpit and religious press in the state. Baylor president Samuel Palmer Brooks, preparing a lecture on “real religion,” urged his fellow Christians into the arena. “Religion is not a system of beliefs,” he wrote, “it is a life.” In similar lecture on Christian “social duties,” Brooks assured his listeners that “Christian life is not a debating society; it is a working force.”⁷ The ubiquity of such calls testified to a revolution in the religious worldview.

Religious nuance eroded. Evangelical Texans divided their world in two. All the world’s spiritually irrelevant gray matter assumed a menacing form, and all the moral and religious forces of the world became unimpeachably just. The gulf between sacred and secular widened, became unbridgeable. At a Dallas revival meeting in 1896, the evangelist H.M. Wharton declared “There are only two sides, the Lord’s side and the devil’s side. Every one of us here to-night is on the one or the other, and friends, there is no half way ground.”⁸ In 1900, in his *History of Texas Baptists*, Benjamin Franklin Fuller captured this element of the clerical insurgency. He depicted a split world “of the

⁶ B. H. Carroll, “An Office Magnified,” Sermon, 1898. Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection, Archives, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

⁷ Samuel Palmer Brooks, “Social Duties,” undated manuscript, Samuel Palmer Brooks Papers, The Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Samuel Palmer Brooks, “Real Religion,” undated manuscript, Brooks Papers.

⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, June 10, 1896.

righteous and the wicked,” and drew “the radical and essential difference” between them.⁹ More and more religious Texans awakened to such a stark and irreconcilable division. “I am seeing more and more of the wretchedness [*sic*] and sin of men every day,” wrote Methodist minister IZT Morris in 1907. “Oh!” he said, “how we do need a great revival in the church.”¹⁰

This world-at-odds proved fertile ground for moral reform. Clerics created a world without neutrality, without disinterest. They dictated that religious Texans fight. If you weren’t fighting, they said, you were losing. You were losing ground. Their enemies, their malevolent all-conspiring enemies, would never cease. Never stop menacing. Clericalism indoctrinated its followers in this fighting creed. Its persistent martial metaphors depicted a world at war. There were walls and towers and on the other side of the walls lurked dark and mysterious evils lusting for destruction. It was therefore the duty of religious Texans to man the walls and defend righteousness, to engage with evil and never turn back.

The clerical worldview abolished all possibility of neutrality or disinterest. At the Dallas revival, Rev. Wharton told the story of a physician he knew. Wharton had preached that “Anyone who is not serving the Lord is serving the devil.” The physician objected, and said, “I am not serving the Lord, but I want you to understand I am not serving the devil.” The preacher declared his neutrality in service to Satan. He explained it this way: duck hunters use decoys. They set wooden ducks in the water and the wooden ducks attract real ducks and the real ducks become easy prey for the hunter. The apathetic man was the devil’s decoy, Wharton explained, because his apathy lured others. It stole

⁹ B.F. Fuller, *History of Texas Baptists* (Louisville, Ky.: Baptist Book Concern, 1900), 3.

¹⁰ I. Z. T. Morris to Elijah L. Shettles, July 8, 1907. Shettles Papers.

men, women, and children away from the churches. Wharton concluded by explaining “There never was a time when Jesus Christ’s people were more called upon to show their colors and to come out upon God’s side.”¹¹ This was a time for choosing.

Any who failed to act, according to the crusaders, barely merited Christian brotherhood. In December 1900, Presbyterian minister J. J. Smith preached what *The Fort Worth Morning Register* described as “something out of the ordinary run of Sabbath talks.” Smith tried, the paper said, to define a Christian. The dire times required a fundamental re-examination of Christian assumptions, Smith said. “From the beginning of time until now, there never was a time when a true Christian was so much sought after as to-day.” What, then, was a true Christian? It was simple. According to Smith, “A Christian is God’s man.” He is God’s man at all times, he said, “in the darkness or in the light; when the sun is high or when the sun is low; when the tide ebbs or when the tide flows.” A true Christian devotes his life to God’s work, and not the spiritual burden alone. “A Christian,” Smith said, “is a Christ in the world. ...Whatever is for the uplift of the world, the Christian should interest himself in that.” Being Christian meant work. And serious and impactful work. “The office of an angel is not higher,” Smith said. Therefore, the true Christian must use his voice, “never keeping silent when he ought to speak,” Smith said, and always “bearing testimony against wrong, injustice and falsehood.” But it was more than mere voice; it was action. “There is no sight so soul-inspiring,” Smith said, “as to see a Christian throw himself into the thick of the battle.” Smith had to ask so fundamental a question—“what is a Christian?”—because he was providing a new and novel definition. In the tumultuous upheaval of the spiritual crisis and the dramatic launching of the clerical crusades, religion itself was changing, and

¹¹ *Dallas Morning News*, 1896.

changing rapidly. But men such as Smith made sure to lay the issue bare. They were clear in their declarations: “The one thing for you to find out if you are a Christian,” Smith said, “is not a new Christ ... but a new view of Christ. Get the right conception of Christ. Get the true idea of Christ’s mission among men.” His audience *was* getting it: from Smith, from Carroll, from Cranfill, and from all the gathering armies of the new clerical culture.¹² Religious Texans were engaging the world, and that engagement increasingly defined them as religious.

And it increasingly identified the region. The ingredients of the Bible Belt brewed across the South. Religious southerners prayed for action and looked to clericalism for salvation.¹³ In 1903, the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly complained that churches “have been moulded by, rather than helpfully moulded, the spirit of the age.”¹⁴ They ached to act. “Standing on the summit of this unparalleled century and casting our glance forward into the next, pregnant with untold possibilities,” Methodist bishops in 1898 pledged that “this General Conference is confronted with extraordinary opportunities, and therefore with momentous responsibilities. God help us to be equal to the times in which we live.”¹⁵ Just as the weight of the spiritual crisis threatened to wear down southern religion, the clerical insurgents arrived with their inspirational exhortations. They promised release. They promised action. These Texans declared war on all of the anticlerical constraints muzzling their new aggressive religion.

¹² *The Fort Worth Morning Register*, December 18, 1900.

¹³ Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 169.

¹⁴ Presbyterian Church in the United States, General Assembly, *Minutes*, 1902 (Richmond, VA.: 1902), 297-8, quoted in Kenneth K. Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 36.

¹⁵ Methodist Episcopal Church, South, General Conference, *Journal*, 1898, (Nashville, Tenn.: n.d.), 19, quoted in Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism*, 38.

In May 1898, the Reverend J. Gilmore Smith of Bethany Presbyterian Church in Dallas issued a call to arms. He expressed frustration with lingering anticlerical impediments. “It has been said to me of late your business is to preach the gospel, you are supposed to be dead to all civil life,” he declared. This mandated withdrawal of the church from public life, he said, was “the greatest evil of the times.” To Smith, a true Christian must engage the world. It was not enough to entertain an opinion only, to confine it to the pulpit. He argued that “the church has failed to do her duty.” He recognized the great, untapped potential of an activist clergy freed from inflexible constraints: “The church of the living God holds the balance of power and if both men and women would unite and exert the power at their command they could raise a blast of public sentiment along those lines that would make the politicians bend before them.” He concluded his sermon with an exhortation to act immediately, to get into civil life and politics and make the voice of the church supreme. “Your duty and my duty and the duty of every man and woman calling themselves Christians,” he preached, “is to go into politics.”¹⁶ Over the following decades, they would—but first they needed a rallying point, a symbol that reinforced group boundaries, allowed for self-reinforcing ritual, and offered a way into politics. They found it, slowly, in prohibition and other moral reforms.

The spreading culture of clericalism indoctrinated converts into its dichotomous good-and-evil world. Moral evils, once confined to the periphery of religious concerns, moved menacingly into the foreground. The saloons and theaters suddenly trumped lethargy and apathy as the chief impediments to religious progress. Unsettled clerics moved aggressively and the clerical groundswell flooded communities across the state.

¹⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, May 16, 1898.

At the turn of the century, the booming lumber industry sprung several towns suddenly into existence. Tapped by the railroads, the small East Texas town of Caro rapidly claimed 1,300 souls.¹⁷ Overseen by a family of local lumber barons, the Whitemans, the town carved from a denuded wilderness a post office, schools, drugstores, general stores, grocers—and a Methodist Church. C. N. Morton arrived in 1907 with orders from his presiding elder to tend souls, “not to meddle with local affairs.” But in Caro, the pilgrim Morton found spiritual laziness and worldly abandon. The Whitemans ran everything, including church life. “Mrs. W. dictates the policy of the church,” Morton complained, “but she is not religious and has drawn around her some of the upper tens of the town who are not only irreligious but frivolous and irreverent in church.” Worse, they bankrolled sinful amusements. Non-interference was a fool’s errand. “When local affairs take the form of a ‘skating rink’ with billiard and pool room attached and I am called upon not only to refrain from saying anything against it but to indorse [*sic*] it with my presence,” Morton fumed, “I feel like the limit has been reached.” Morton launched a crusade. Other religious leaders were doing the same in small towns and cities all across the region.

Local option elections—countywide referendums on liquor—erupted everywhere. They were bubbles on the tide of clericalism. In places such as Kaufman, Wood, Haskell and many other counties, fiercely fought contests exploded in spending, activism and passion. An agent of the liquor dealers, Oscar Paget, wrote of a 1907 election in Milam County that “was bitter and personal” and upon which partisans spent an estimated \$10,000. Paget described the antis as “fighters ... men who spared no effort to win – who

¹⁷ Christopher Long, "Caro, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hlc12>), accessed March 01, 2011. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

were sleepless and tireless.¹⁸ These were not casual, passionless elections. They were life-and-death struggles for the soul of the South.

Precisely because they were not casual or passionless, local antivice crusades enflamed religious excitement. Local actors were consistently awed by their crusades' wonderful side-effects. The rural Methodist minister Jesse Lee began assaulting sin in his Franklin station in 1907. "O Ile [*sic*] tell you," he wrote, "I was after the dancers and card players with a hot spike."¹⁹ He sustained the efforts against dancing, drinking, and gambling for months. "I have run into them with all the force of the Gospil [*sic*]," he wrote.²⁰ He predicted that "God is going to bless my coming meeting as He has not heretofore blessed this town."²¹ He wasn't wrong. The results, as he reported them, were nothing short of phenomenal. Attendance at his Franklin church was up; attendance at the ball room and bar room was down. "My ministry has been attended with wonderful power in the last weeks," he said, accompanied by "a greate [*sic*] gain Spiritually." "I don't see how I can turn loose here now," he said.²²

Moral reform inevitably bound religious communities together. United against vice, they defied the languor of the spiritual crisis. It is a sociological truism that group identity derives from shared characteristics and from shared difference.²³ Self-identity derives not only from the things one believes but from those he does not. Moral reform

¹⁸ Ormond Paget to Bertrand Adoue, Esq., "Report for the Month of August, 1907," Alexander Dienst Collection, 1784–1929, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

¹⁹ Jesse Lee to Elijah L. Shettles, September 16, 1907. Shettles Papers.

²⁰ Jesse Lee to Elijah L. Shettles, October 1, 1907. Shettles Papers,

²¹ Jesse Lee to Elijah L. Shettles, September 16, 1907. Shettles Papers.

²² Jesse Lee to Elijah L. Shettles, October 1, 1907. Shettles Papers.

²³ For southern religious history, see especially Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 2–3. For contemporary evangelicals and sociological theory, see particularly Christian Smith and Michael Emerson, et al, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

crystallized all of this. Like a social glue it united pastors and congregants into a distinct and meaningful moral community. In the small town of Caro, Methodist minister C. N. Morton marveled at the effects of his anti-skating rink campaign. “We have had and are having the severest test we have ever experienced and it has brought us closer to God and made us to feel as never before the need of His help,” he wrote. The church’s previous pastor survived by acquiescing to the town’s leading family and keeping quiet about the local skating rink. But the congregation languished. Now Morton found that uniting against the “skating rink craze” invigorated his congregation. “I believe,” Morton predicted, “there is going to be a reaction which will be for the glory of God and the good of his cause.”²⁴

Activism invigorated the clergy. They found the answer to all of their aggressive exhortations, a platform to exert their own moral authority, and an evil sufficiently menacing to magnify their station. It gave meaning. “Friends,” the evangelist H. M. Wharton said at the 1896 Dallas revival, “there is something in the thought that we are on the right side.”²⁵ Fighting vice, and all of the organizational minutiae that accompanied it, made vivid the clerics’ self-declared war against immorality. Before assuming control of the *Baptist Standard*, J. B. Cranfill edited the *Waco Advance*, served on a Baptist missionary board, and lectured against vice. But that’s not how he described his work. After a brief respite, he said, “I hastened back to Waco to plunge again into the thick of the battle I was waging for the conquest of Texas for Christ and His cause.”²⁶ The neurasthenic preacher, prone to restless nights and panic attacks, had found his place in

²⁴ C. N. Morton to Elijah L. Shettles, May 8, 1907. Shettles Papers.

²⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, June 10, 1896.

²⁶ J. B. Cranfill, *Dr. J. B. Cranfill’s Chronicle: A Story of Life in Texas* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916), 386.

the world. He mattered for something. And if he mattered, then all of religion mattered. And if the clerics succeeded, then religion could be redeemed and a wayward culture restored to God. These were the stakes for which the preacher was unleashed upon the world, and they were no exaggeration. Baptist luminary George Truett, at the height of the clerical crusade in 1911, likened one Baptist gathering to “a great council of war where God’s men have surveyed the battle-field and have taken cognizance of their forces,” before concluding simply that “the issue is the conquest of the world for the savior.”²⁷

With so much at stake, the clerics threw themselves into battle. George Rankin recalled his first assaults on the barrooms, saying “As for the saloons, I opened up on them. It was time for somebody to come to the front and challenge them to mortal combat.” All over Texas—and all over the country—preachers and other religious leaders were declaring war. “I threw down the gauntlet,” Rankin said, “and turned loose a fusillade upon them.”²⁸ All the competing impulses of the clerical culture collided in George Rankin’s career. An ambitious and aggressive advocate for an expanded church, Rankin longed to see religion enthroned and its champions recognized. He found in moral reform a mechanism for personal advancement. By attacking saloons, gambling halls, prostitution, and other easily identifiable evils, ministers won fame and advanced their careers. George Rankin’s anti-vice crusades in Houston garnered headlines and, he recalled, “brought me and my Church work into prominence, not only in the city, but throughout that portion of the State.”

²⁷ George W. Truett, “The Coming of the Kingdom in America,” in *The Baptist World Alliance, Second Congress, Philadelphia, June 19-25, 1911: Record of Proceedings* (Philadelphia, Pa., Harper & Brother Company, for the Philadelphia Committee, 1911), 421-429.

²⁸ George C. Rankin, *The Story of My Life, or, More Than Half a Century as I Have Lived It and Seen It Lived* (Nashville: Smith & Lamar, 1912), 343

The logic of moral warfare necessitated clericalism's expansion. It invigorated everything it touched. Religious leaders won fame and professional advancement, and anxiety-wracked Christians could see past the spiritual crisis and finally touch righteousness. They escaped the sinking wreckage of the old-time gospel and exiled the fears of the past generation. The clerics recognized the great power that was theirs. Rankin himself, after helping pass a local ordinance that closed saloons on Sunday, marveled at what "can always be done when the moral element stand by a courageous leader."²⁹ The power of this recognition stirred religious Texans to act. For the next decade, for the next century, this recognition inspired the wall-destroying fervor of Christian activists. The logic of Christian politics impelled its champions out into the world, against the strongholds of anticlericalism, and into the lifeblood of the public culture. "If we as individual Christians set down and fold out hands," Presbyterian Rev. M. W. Robison said in 1902, "we turn our government over to the mob, and must expect corruption and lawlessness."³⁰ But if they acted, the clerics promised, they could expect wonderful rewards. They would win the esteem and respect of their peers. They would see their churches grow, their careers furthered, and the spiritual crisis evaporated. A floundering religion would be saved. But barriers remained. Anticlerics still lurked among the churches.

The accelerating clerical culture provoked a reckoning among the denominations. The anticlerical traditionalists and the clerical activists clashed and struggled. And the tide was turning. Whereas in 1887 the impudent politics of Carroll and Cranfill and other prohibitionists had scandalized the religious establishment, split the churches, and

²⁹ Rankin, *The Story of My Life*, 343.

³⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, January 8, 1902.

undercut reformers' efforts, a new generation of young church leaders eagerly embraced the clerical insurgency and exiled the last vestiges of anticlerical Christianity. The battle was brutal, and the bloodletting severe.

From the beginning, many had resisted the denominational fervor of the late-nineteenth century. Political preacher par excellence J. B. Cranfill was reared by Primitive ("Hardshell") Baptists, stubbornly Biblical Christians opposed to mission work and worldly entanglements.³¹ Opponents lurked in the major evangelical churches, and "disorganizers" won the ire of them all. Yet they persevered. Critics of excessive organization remained. Tasked with putting a program together for a Methodist district meeting in 1908, Rev. J.B. Turrentine bristled against the task. He hated the meetings. He called the hyper-organized denominational structures "weights instead of wings." He lamented the soulless and undemocratic hierarchy of the denominational bureaucracy. "The tendency is too much towards centralization," he wrote. He believed "we are fast building up an oligarchy." The rapid period of denomination building had decayed lay power. Fewer laymen attended denominational meetings and fewer felt empowered within the church. "The Methodist church," Turrentine wrote, "belongs to the membership of the church, not connectional boards nor conference boards nor our Bishops nor even our preachers." But the clerical culture rested on the authority of the clerics themselves. Their strategies privileged religious and political leaders, not laymen. And the evolution of the denomination reflected it. "It is a fact," Turrentine wrote, "that we preachers have gradually absorbed or acquired in some way about all the authority the church has."³²

³¹ Cranfill, *Cranfill's Chronicle*, 89-93

³² J. B. Turrentine to Elijah L. Shettles, May 25, 1908. Shettles Papers.

Turrentine wasn't alone. The "disorganizer" ethos that had fractured denominations a generation earlier persevered into the next. As religious organizations exploded all across the country, alienated churchgoers criticized strict creeds, high clerical salaries, and rampant commercialism. Fort Worth readers could sympathize with Ohio's Baptist preacher Arthur Gee and his rants that "churchianity is taking the place of Christianity."³³ But unlike the preceding generation, these critics carried increasingly little currency. The organizers of the previous decades had won that battle. And the political preachers of the current decade were winning theirs.

The spiritual crisis provoked soul-searching among anxious evangelicals. Self-proclaimed redeemers offered several diagnoses. In its 1907 editorial on the assumed decline of church-going, the *Dallas Morning News* identified two possibilities: "One insists that the ministry has lost its influence in the higher line by going into politics too deeply, while another contends that the trouble comes of the ministry's failure to go far enough into politics and other practical lines."³⁴ The clerics, of course, argued the latter. The church languished, they said, "because Christ has been presented as a servant instead of a king, ... because some have tried to distinguish between the secular and the religious and thus isolated religion from God's great world."³⁵ Others weren't so sure.

Anticlerical resistance persisted within the churches. As covered in earlier chapters, several denominations fractured over issues of denominationalism, missions, education, and politics. Internal strife survived. Some disaffected Christians retreated into rival denominations. James William Lowber and the Christian Church (known

³³ *Dallas Morning News*, August 9, 1908.

³⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, May 12, 1907.

³⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, May 12, 1907.

colloquially as the Disciples of Christ) harvested their discontent. They welcomed anticlerical Christians into their expanding denomination.

Dr. James William Lowber invigorated several Texas Christian Churches (the Disciples of Christ) around the turn-of-the-century with exclusively spiritual calls. In five years in Fort Worth, Lowber reportedly grew the First Christian Church of Fort Worth from around two-hundred members to around eight hundred and oversaw the construction of an imposing \$30,000 stone church. From Fort Worth he took charge of the American Christian Missionary Society's mission in Galveston and turned a membership of a few dozen into one-hundred-and-twenty-five and moved them into a new \$8,000 church. Finally, in 1896 he took his talents to the Central Christian Church of Austin and, as he had done so many times, oversaw construction of an imposing new building that his contemporary, Eugene Barker, the pioneer of Texas history, called "one of the handsomest and most commodious stone church buildings in the city, and even in the state." Equally skilled at subscribing funds and organizing congregations as he was delivering sermons, Lowber won acclaim. The elder statesman John H. Reagan praised him widely. He became Chancellor of Add-Ran University (later Texas Christian University) and lectured regularly. He published several acclaimed books. Although well-learned and well-spoken, in his preaching Lowber always, in Barker's words, retained "a good degree of evangelical pungency and fervor."³⁶ Lowber oversaw the era's typical church expansion, but steered it toward spirituality, not politics. He walked only half of the clerical path.

³⁶ Eugene C. Barker, *A History of Texas and Texans*, Vol. 4 (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1914), 1786-8.

For all of his successes, as an apostle of the Christian Church Lowber shared his denomination's historical disgust for squabbling and strife. In a 1902 article, Lowber justified the Disciples precisely because they abhorred worldliness: "The gospel is God's power for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles," he said, and "the Holy Spirit in conversion operates through the gospel. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit; and for this reason the apostles were sent in every direction to conquer the world for Christ. They conquered with the sword of the Spirit, and not *with* the literal sword as did Mohammed and his disciples. The fact that Christianity conquered the world by love and not by force, is one great reason why it has impressed itself upon the very face of civilization."³⁷ Barker, the secular historian, praised Lowber for his restraint: "He is never warped by prejudice, nor made narrow by partisanism. If, when treating of great social evils, some righteous indignation burns through his terse and compact sentences against the moral apathy of society, in the presence of such inexcusable wrongs, they are never degraded by any tone or color of moral malignity."³⁸ Increasingly marginalized within mainstream evangelical churches, disaffected religious Texans flooded into the pastoral care of such shepherds. Others, however, remained in the old churches. They fought from within.

In 1897, S. O. Mitchell preached a sermon at Dallas's First Baptist Church urging the congregation to be done with "this eternal wrangling." He preached from Colossians 2:10: "Ye are complete in him." He told the congregation to get out of the world and come back to Christ. "He wished," the *Dallas Morning News* reported, "that the great Baptist brotherhood of Texas would ... have done with this external wrangling and war

³⁷ Cadwell Walton Raines, *Year Book for Texas, 1901* (Austin: Gammel Book Company, 1902), 44.

³⁸ Barker, *Texas and Texans*, Vol. 4, 1788.

that is now tearing homes and churches and peoples asunder.” He promoted an old-time gospel of personal redemption. Through Christ alone, he said, would believers defeat the world and the devil and the flesh. Mitchell closed his sermon with a vignette. He told of a prominent businessman, an old and profane man who had sinned and gambled his years away. But the sinner visited his eleven-year-old granddaughter, who read scripture to him. The words converted him, Mitchell said. They convicted his heart, he came to Christ, and the church received him. There were no anti-vice crusades, Mitchell said, no politicians elected, and no campaigns waged. Only the pure gospel.³⁹

Even some who dabbled in reform confessed their doubts. Country Methodist Jesse Lee longed for a widespread religious resurgence, but, after reading English evangelist J. Stuart Holden’s *The Price of Power*, reconsidered his political commitment. Holden, and Lee, feared for religious spirituality. “No man who does not renounce all forms of leadership other than the spiritual can ever know the endowment of a personal Pentecost,” Holden wrote.⁴⁰ Lee agreed and urged his colleagues to heed Holden’s work. Lee urged a program of revivals, but “let it be understood it is to be of the strictest Evangelical type,” he said.⁴¹

While a persistent anticlericalism dogged the infant clerical movement, official denominational policies lagged behind the insurgency. In 1888 the Southern Baptist Convention rejected several prohibition resolutions. President James P. Boyce declared them counter to the convention’s stated aims of “eliciting, combining and directing the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort for the propagation of the

³⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, August 9, 1897.

⁴⁰ J. Stuart Holden, *The Price of Power* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), 9.

⁴¹ Jesse Lee to Elijah L. Shettles, January 19, 1909. Shettles Papers.

gospel.”⁴² Reform didn’t aid the cause of Christ; it blocked it. The other denominational behemoth, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, agreed. “Our church is strictly a religious and in no wise a political body,” the organization proclaimed in 1894. “The more closely we keep ourselves to the one work of testifying to all men repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, the better shall we promote the highest good of our country and race.”⁴³

In 1899 a young George W. Truett pleaded with the Southern Baptist Convention to preserve the Baptist’s spiritual mission. Decades later, Truett towered over Southern Baptists: he served several years as president of the convention, presided over Dallas’ gargantuan First Baptist Church, promoted a “Christian nation,” and delivered a famous sermon on the steps of the United States Capitol. In 1899, however, the young upstart championed evangelical spirituality. In a speech before the Southern Baptist Convention, Truett urged humility in the pulpit. He preached a simple gospel: “Christ and Christ only.” It was pure, he said, it was biblical. But worldly reformers undermined it with their worldly obsessions. For them, the redeeming gospel of the spirit was not enough. “Does someone say,” he asked, “that this theme is ‘too narrow?’” No, he countered, it is everything, “it is an infinite ocean.” Anything else was superfluous, unbiblical, and heretical.⁴⁴

Truett turned to Paul, who, he said, “might have taken to the lecture platform to be what they now call a “moral reformer.” He might have spent his days declaring against

⁴² Southern Baptist Convention, *Annual*, 1888 (Atlanta, 1888), 3, 33-34, quoted in Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism*, 35

⁴³ Methodist Episcopal Church, South, General Conference, *Journal*, 1894 (Nashville: n.d.), 34-35, in Bailey, 35.

⁴⁴ George Truett, “The Subject and Object of the Gospel (Annual Sermon preached before the Southern Baptist Convention at Louisville, Ky., May 12, 1899,” in George Truett, *We Would See Jesus, and Other Sermons*, ed. J. B. Cranfill (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1915), 206.

the popular sins or against the abuses and corruptions of government.” Instead Paul “steadfastly clung to one sufficient theme, ‘Christ and Him crucified.’” To anticlerical Christians like Truett, a true faith clung to Christ, Paul, John the Baptist, and the apostles. The insurgent reformers, on the other hand, innovated unbiblical traps and falsehoods. “There is now a great itch abroad in the land demanding ‘reform,’” Truett warned. “The air is filled with screaming voices which propose to adjust the discordant elements of both church and state.” Truett urged vigilance.⁴⁵

So too did Robert Dabney, the learned Presbyterian transplant. “The appropriate mission of the minister is to preach the gospel for the salvation of souls,” he wrote. Any deviation indicted the offending minister. A cleric, he said, “is clearly guilty of disobedience to his master, if not of treason to his charge.” With eternity in the balance, what could reform possibly merit? What did a law or a politician matter when dealing with eternal souls? A true Christian, Dabney claimed, would never deviate from pure evangelism if he believed in the redeeming power of Christ. He would see the fleeting emptiness of worldly care. Dabney concluded that “One great source, therefore, of political preaching may always be found in the practical unbelief of [the preacher] himself.” Clerics neglected the work of God. “What is this,” he asked, “but treason?”⁴⁶

Dabney was an aging voice, but an influential one. He trained a generation of Presbyterian ministers, first at the Union Theological Seminary at Hampden-Sydney College, in Virginia, and, after 1883, at the Austin School of Theology in Austin,

⁴⁵ Truett, “The Subject and Object,” 212.

⁴⁶ *The Texas Presbyterian*, May 4, 1894.

Texas.⁴⁷ Even while capturing popular attention for his militant Lost Cause mythology, he indoctrinated his students in the rigorous otherworldly demands of the evangelical ministry, or what his denomination called the “doctrine of spirituality.” He published a collection of lectures, *Sacred Rhetoric*, as a “guide to the evangelical Protestant preacher.” He said that proper preachers, relying only upon the “plain truths” of the Bible, need only be the messengers of a simple saving faith: “Christ and him crucified.” This was it. This was a minister’s only mission. The pulpit itself, Dabney said, was sacred. God “has appointed one place into which nothing shall enter, except the things of eternity, and has ordained an order of officers, whose sole charge is to remind their fellow-men of their duty to God.” While a minister may play his part as a citizen, “In the pulpit he is only the ambassador of Christ.”⁴⁸

If any particular heresy lured the good gospel minister, it was politics. “The scriptural doctrine of the preacher's mission and warrant also decides at once against an abuse of the pulpit, to which the clergy have always been prone,” Dabney wrote. “It may be named with sufficient accuracy by the popular phrase, ‘political preaching.’” Politics seduced both the Catholic and the Protestant, he warned, and “its tendency has always been to embitter party spirit, to provoke bloodshed, and to corrupt the hearts of the hearers.” Dabney blamed the lust for politics on the preacher’s unique station: “Clergymen are accustomed to deference and unused to contradiction ... They become accustomed to sanctifying their creeds in their own eyes, and regarding their quarrel as

⁴⁷ While he built up the Austin School of Theology, he served as the chair of mental and moral philosophy at the University of Texas. For Dabney, see Sean Michael Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Philipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2005).

⁴⁸ Robert Lewis Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric: or, a Course of Lectures on Preaching* (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1870), 42-45.

God's. Thus their very animosities become holy in their view.” Political preaching, Dabney concluded, rested only upon the wayward minister’s “self-love and vanity.”⁴⁹

Many churches held out against the clerical onslaught. Austin’s University Methodist Church boasted of its minister’s noninterference in politics. Despite criticisms from leading reformers, the minister, Rev. D. E. Hawk, according to reports, “remained firm in his determination never to discuss politics from the pulpit in spite of the charges.”⁵⁰ The anticlerical tradition remained rooted in the evangelical churches. As activists maneuvered to capture key denominational offices, strongholds of resistance plagued the clerical insurgency. Some, like Dabney, penned eloquent theological appeals; others, like one anonymous Dallas church member, dropped beer receipts into the collection plate. Whatever their methods, the anticlerics defied the clerical insurgency. But they wouldn’t resist for long⁵¹

The rising tide of clericalism threatened to wash over the churches. Leaders in the denominations penned their pleas for activism. The *Baptist Standard* inveighed against the humble preacher, saying, “Our little pen-knife preachers are not worth much. They are in the Kingdom what minnows are along the edges of the mighty ocean.” Although not yet ready to embrace the “political preacher” label and quick to disclaim violations of church and state separation, church organizations nevertheless advanced their clerical agenda. “Civil government must be run on principles of righteousness,” they declared.⁵²

Anticlerical ministers faded into irrelevance. Sympathetic to reformers, Methodist preacher A. Y. Old nevertheless refused to preach prohibition and closed his pulpit to

⁴⁹ Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 40-1.

⁵⁰ *Temple Daily Telegram*, October 31, 1912.

⁵¹ *Dallas Morning News*, June 10, 1896.

⁵² *Baptist Standard*, March 16, 1911.

reformers. Although church members and denominational officials complained, Old adhered to principle. His anticlericalism “never failed to bring censure upon me,” he said. “I have felt that standing so true to my conscience in this issue, I have been set back into more or less obscurity as a Methodist preacher.”⁵³ His career dead-ended on an out-of-the-way circuit in Central Texas. The new denominational world rewarded church-builders and political organizers. Traditionalists fell to the wayside. Others were pushed.

The urgency of clerical activists overwhelmed their opponents. In Cameron, reform fever riled Reverend J.T. Smith’s Methodist Church. A lost local option election provoked an uproar among the membership. The church turned against itself. “My people are very sore some of them,” Smith wrote his presiding elder, “and doing now it seems to me some very imprudent things.” The church’s Sunday school leader opposed prohibition, and the congregation knew it when they put him in. But the rising pitch of the prohibition battle unbalanced everything. The members turned against him. Though he otherwise engaged actively in the entire spiritual life of the church, and many of his prohibitionist opponents missed prayer meetings and ran businesses on Sundays and frequently skipped services, the clerical culture had prohibition as a defining issue, and the Sunday school leader was on the wrong side. A bloc of members set an ultimatum: either the teacher resign, or they would. For preachers and churches untutored in or unaligned with the clerical crusade, the insurgency unsettled everything. “O,” Smith wrote, “I tell you I am in it.”⁵⁴

Such purges were not uncommon. T. D. Cobbs, an old attorney from San Antonio, mourned his expulsion from the Baptist Church. A self-proclaimed “devoted and earnest

⁵³ A. Y. Old to Edwin D. Mouzon, January 4, 1913. Edwin Mouzon Papers, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

⁵⁴ J. T. Smith to Elijah L. Shettles, September 4, 1907. Shettles Papers.

Christian,” Cobbs nevertheless resisted the prohibition frenzy. For that alone he lost his church. “On account of my prohibition views,” he wrote, “I was driven storm-tossed from the church I loved.” He inveighed against his pastor, “whose narrowness and fanaticism led him along lines of injustice and injury.” But he refused to repudiate the church. “I do not attack Christianity because it is not responsible for it. Men,” he said, “are often misguided and take up wrong views.” He decried the “fanaticism” of the zealots. Though deposed, Cobbs said he still clung to the true spiritual church. The clerics were imposters, he said. But the clerics were winning. There were Cobbs in churches all across the country, deposed heretics exiled for their political foot-dragging.⁵⁵

Clarence Ousley, a Fort Worth newspaper editor, cringed. He conceded the liquor traffic’s debauching malevolence but he abhorred the purges. “Within my acquaintance,” he said, “I happen to know several men of Christian profession or sympathy who have been alienated from the church or from active participation in its affairs or from generous support of its work by the cruel speeches and writings of Christian ministers.”⁵⁶ Clerics held nothing back.

In 1911, amid that year’s contentious political contests, a prohibitionist preacher asked to speak at the Houston Young Men’s Christian Association. Eager to avoid controversy, the local branch agreed but only if the speaker avoided the prohibition question. Such foot-dragging outraged *The Baptist Standard*. The paper editorialized that the association “should strike out the name Christian” from its title. “For an organization to pretend to be Christian, and refuse to side against the devil’s chief agency on earth, is a clear misuse of a sacred name and an abuse of Christian confidence. Let it [The YMCA]

⁵⁵ T. D. Cobbs to B. H. Carroll, July 24, 1911. Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection.

⁵⁶ Clarence Ousley to Edwin D. Mouzon, January 11, 1913, Mouzon Papers.

be the Y. M. A.,” the paper declared.⁵⁷ In the crusade against liquor, there was no middle ground. “The things of Christ,” editor Gambrell avowed in 1910, “are things about which there can be no division among God’s people. Every saloon is a menace to Christian work. Every one of us should be ready all the time to fight the saloon. I am ready to part with every friend of mine who wants to stand between the saloon and the enraged anti-saloon people of this State.”⁵⁸ Such declarations demonstrated religious leaders’ willingness to purge dissenters from positions of influence.

Austin’s University Methodist Church clung tenuously to its apolitical Methodism. The incumbent minister, D. E. Hawk, spoke against political preaching. In 1912 the board of stewards requested that their next minister continue the tradition. They asked that Hawk’s successor “take no dish in politics, but confine himself entirely to the Gospel.” The *Temple Daily Telegram* reported the subsequent developments as reading “more like a political novel than a story dealing with the assignment of clergymen according to the rules and regulations of the Methodist church.” Bishop James Atkins obliged the steward’s request by appointing Robert Shuler, later far-famed as “Fighting Bob” Shuler of Los Angeles, Southern California’s apostle of militant fundamentalism, to the office. His appointment was a clear affront to the board of stewards. Shuler certainly lived up to his future name. He was a fighter. His strident rhetoric put him on the vanguard of aggressive religion.⁵⁹ The stewards complained and requested a replacement but to no avail. The Methodist hierarchy quashed dissent. Entrenched in high offices and supported by growing numbers of church members, the last bastions of anticlerical sentiment washed away.

⁵⁷ *Baptist Standard*, April 20, 1911.

⁵⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, May 13, 1910.

⁵⁹ *Temple Daily Telegram*, October 31, 1912.

By the early years of the twentieth century, the clerical insurgency had maneuvered itself into the best appointments, had built the largest churches, and had captured the highest offices. Denominational presses churned out clerical material, denominational schools churned out clerical students, and empowered congregations exalted clerical laypersons. Evangelical religion underwent a revolution. The diffusion of the spiritual crisis paved the foundation, the organizational impulse supplied the materials, and the clerical insurgents provided the work. But to influence the broader culture, to earn for the South the “Bible Belt” monicker, the clerics had more battles to wage. They had to disseminate an ideology with views of history and government and God. The secular world awaited, but the churches were falling into line. Away from the mainstream anticlerical culture, churches were massing for rebellion. In the churches, militant ideologies prospered. Fervor and zeal trampled hesitance. The world lacked for religion; clerics would supply it.

Moral warfare smoldered in Texas for decades. Then, for several years, it raged. Clerical energy spilled over religion’s edge. Evangelicals organized, anticlerics mobilized, and the state erupted in religious warfare. The world was up for grabs. Conflict cut the state across cultural lines and engulfed its politics at all levels. It became the pressing struggle of the age. The character and the consequences of that struggle are the subjects of following chapters. But even as clericalism graduated from insurgent church culture to dominant ideology, and moved from the denominations into the public arena, still resistance lurked among the religious. Repressed, marginalized, and weakened, resentment still stewed among unhappy dissidents. The desperate remnants of

anticlerical Christianity testified to clericalism's persistent divisiveness. One episode among the Methodists is illustrative.

Over the course of his career, Methodist Bishop Edwin Mouzon ranged across religious divides. For much of his tenure he led the forces of clericalism. He mobilized troops in political contests and won headlines for maligning politicians. And yet he wore the clerical mantle uncomfortably. The church's unending political crusades troubled him. He had won the bishop's seat as an alternative to the fighting editor-cleric George Rankin. He urged his cohorts to remember their spiritual mission. At the height of the prohibition crusade, while his peers stoked political agitation, the bishop urged restraint.

Mouzon sensationalized his clerical brethren with a 1912 Christmas Day sermon he delivered in San Antonio. His message was simple: the church's political adventures must be reined in and its spiritual mission must be reemphasized. He shared his contemporaries' political commitments but feared they had become obsessions. It was time, he said, for the church's to return to Christ. "I am pleading, I say, for a more spiritual ministry—for a ministry which draws men to Christ, even as Christ drew men to himself," he said.⁶⁰ It had been years since a high-ranking official in a major evangelical church had delivered such an appeal. "Here in Texas," Mouzon confided afterward, "many of our preachers have had more zeal than knowledge. A word was needed from some one in authority, which would go out to those on the outside," he said.⁶¹

The speech rippled over the region. Mississippi Methodist J. D. Barbee Jr. read about the speech in the New Orleans *Time-Democrat*. He loved it. Barbee adhered to an old brand of evangelical Christianity. "I am profoundly convinced that the extent to

⁶⁰ *Texas Christian Advocate*, January 2, 1913.

⁶¹ Edwin D. Mouzon to J. D. Barbee, Jr, December 28, 1912. Mouzon Papers.

which our ministers have participated in unwise political discussion largely accounts for the dearth of spirituality among us at this time,” he wrote. As the speech worked its way through church circles, Mouzon’s old rival for the bishop’s seat, George Rankin, denounced it in the *Texas Christian Advocate*. Barbee was ecstatic. He hoped the controversy could rekindle the clerical-anticlerical debate and push back against the clerical insurgents. It “affords a capital opportunity,” he said, a chance to deliver “a clarion call for a more spiritual ministry.”⁶² The controversy only spread. Rankin begrudgingly reprinted the speech in the *The Texas Christian Advocate*, where its anticlerical frustrations appealed to anticlerical exiles.⁶³

Frank E. Thomas, a Methodist presiding elder, agreed with Mouzon. “It has rejoiced me that you have sounded this warning note to the ministry to be careful lest in their zeal for outward reforms they neglect their plain duty as under-shepherds of Jesus Christ.” Thomas subscribed to the old-time religion and he rejected clerical claims to the true faith. “It is very easy for a minister when stirred by the sight of evil all about him to honestly assume the role of reformer but the plain teaching of the New Testament and the verdict of history is against him,” he said. Thomas rejected the premises of the now-dominant clerical culture. He embodied the old guard. Like Barbee, he too rejected the clerical culture as an antidote for the spiritual crisis. If there was a crisis, the clerics had caused it. “Sooner or later he [the reformer] wakes up to the fact that his sheep are scattered, his real leaders missing, and his power to reach the lost sheep absolutely gone.”

⁶² J. D. Barbee Jr., to Wdwin D. Mouzon, December 30, 1912, Mouzon Papers.

⁶³ *Texas Christian Advocate*, January 2, 1913.

The wayward church would win the scorn of the world, Thomas said. He praised Mouzon for leaving a written record testifying that not all Methodists had stood idly by.⁶⁴

Far from heralding an anticlerical resurgence, the anticlerics' private grouching only testified to their own insignificance. Many of Mouzon's correspondents were aging leaders marginalized by the clerical uprising. Some repeated their well-worn refrains and hoped for change. "Too many of our young men (and some older ones) go too far in moral reform and seem to forget that God has called them to save the world through Jesus Christ instead of reform the world through their efforts," wrote Allen Tooke, a Methodist preacher in Fairfield.⁶⁵ Others complained but conceded the field. Isaac Z. T. Morris, a sixty-one-year-old pioneer preacher who had served forty-one years in Texas, believed the battle lost long ago. The young clerics had accomplished their coup. "The impressions throughout the Church (it may be they are among men of my age only) is, that the spirituality of the Conference is lost," he wrote.⁶⁶ Some, of course, still yearned for redemption. James Kilgore, a presiding elder in Houston, wrote to Mouzon to say "We need to be delivered from an influence which has injured the church too long, and you alone can do it."⁶⁷ Mouzon was all they had, and Mouzon was hardly a prototypical anticleric.

For all intents and purposes, the clerics had won. By the second decade of the twentieth century, Christian activists had conquered the churches. They claimed nearly every position of importance in nearly every major evangelical denomination. Having already purged or marginalized dissenters, they moved on to the next battle. Confident in

⁶⁴ Frank M. Thomas to Edwin D. Mouzon, January 8, 1913. Mouzon Papers.

⁶⁵ Allen Tooke to Edwin D. Mouzon, January 1913, Mouzon Papers.

⁶⁶ I. Z. T. Morris, to Edwin D. Mouzon, December 6, 1910. Mouzon Papers.

⁶⁷ James Kilgore to Edwin D. Mouzon, January 2, 1913, Mouzon Papers.

victory, they turned to the public culture and targeted politicians and cultural critics. They were mobilized; the anticlerics were marginalized. The exiles who wrote to Mouzon were artifacts of a bygone era. Diminished in number and inconsequential in impact, they retreated to the sidelines of the ongoing cultural struggle for the heart and soul of their society. Meanwhile, clericalism burst at the seams.

The revolutionary developments swirling around the world of religion traveled in trends and patterns, not events or singularities. But the accumulating evidence of the clerical culture hinted at a tipping point. Seen in a certain light, a moment appears when the anticlerical brand of evangelical Christianity collapsed. Suddenly tensions within the denominations relaxed. The guns went silent. The churches were won. No one quite recognized the precise moment when anticlerical resistance evaporated, but clerics knew they had won. Things had changed, evangelical religion had changed, and soon the world would change. The Bible Belt loomed, unshackled and eager to avenge its long imprisonment.

Developments hinted at the transformation. One extreme episode illustrates the combustible combination of denominational institutions, religious grievances, and unchecked aggression. In Waco, in late 1897, a mass meeting of Baylor University students adopted a resolution condemning the state's great iconoclast, William Cowper Brann. From there, several armed students abducted him from his office, took him to campus, bound, and, at gunpoint, amid a great crowd of students and faculty, forced him to recant his slanderous statements against Baptists and Baylor and swear to leave the city within twenty-four hours. He stayed. Six months later, in April, 1898, a fed-up Baptist

shot and killed him on the city's streets.⁶⁸ It was an exceptional incident, but an indicative one: religious Texans were aggrieved, they were angry, and they were uninhibited. A new era was dawning.

All across the state, activists buzzed with energy. Preachers excited their congregations, denominational papers incensed their readers, and politicians were embracing a new brand of Christian politics. Baptist luminary George Truett embodied those stunning changes. Once he shied from the public sphere. Now he engaged it. Exiled were narrow calls for regenerate sinners and redeemed souls. Gone were anticlerical disclaimers. The clerics had a nation to win. In 1911, Truett traveled to Boston to evangelize the new Texas theology. "What," he asked, "is the task of America? The task of America is that she herself become thoroughly and truly Christian." He explained: "America is to be Christian in her commerce and in her politics, in her art and in her education, in her literature and in every phase and fibre of her social order."⁶⁹ Truett and his brethren longed for something previously thought unattainable: a Christian nation.

But in an anticlerical world that scorned religious activism and loathed political preaching, how had clerics traveled so far so quickly? Truett spoke at a moment when prohibition and moral reform rocked states across the country: how had morality become a consuming issue in the first place? How had the clerics won enough cultural capital outside of their cloistered church worlds to compel the public realm to submit to their politics? They struggled against the accumulated fears and suspicions of generations: how could they hope to win? Part of the answer lies in the ideological battles that preceded the Bible Belt.

⁶⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, April 2, 1898.

⁶⁹ Truett, "The Coming of the Kingdom," 427..

CHAPTER SIX

Conquering Salem: Myth and Memory in the Struggle for the Bible

Belt

In the spring of 2010, the national media glutted themselves on the Texas State Board of Education's crusade to reform state textbook standards. Major daily newspapers and news networks (and blogs and comedy shows) followed the state agency's spectacular efforts to, as the *New York Times* reported, "put a conservative stamp on history and economics textbooks." But the board's conservative bloc, led by dentist-historian Don McLeroy, only saw itself "adding balance" to perceived liberal distortions. They could rescue the past from godless partisans, they believed, by emphasizing a train of conservative heroes, praising the glories of the free market, and giving the founders their religion back.¹ Notable for its naked intentions and infused with an overt religiosity—and conveniently conforming to the national obsession with resurgent conservatism—the board's maneuverings struck a nerve. The board seemed, without embarrassment or apology, to be "rewriting history." But, of course, there is nothing new under the sun. This was not the first time Texans had battled over history.

If, in 2010, a Christian (and conservative) vision weighed on historical consciousness, it has not always done so. Throughout much of Texas history, in fact, majorities subscribed to a potent counter-vision, one that looked warily upon religious ambitions and demanded the defense of a mostly secular public sphere. Anticlericalism drove generations of southerners to resist political religion, but anticlericalism had deep

¹ "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Change," *New York Times*, March 13, 2010.

cultural roots. Southern anticlericalism depended upon something broader, a worldview, a vision that shaped the way generations of critics regarded religion and their world. That vision ran deep: it implicated politicized religion in many of history's darkest chapters and saw government as a welcome safeguard against clerical machinations. It drew from historical images: medieval inquisitors and Salem witch-hunters, "Mohammaden" savagery and primitive tyranny. In so doing, it defined the limited dimensions of an appropriate regional faith. Christianity, anticlerical southerners said, was a spiritual bond between God and individual souls, not a worldly weapon of reform. Such attitudes dictated political choices and propped up political demagogues, men such as Senator Richard Coke, who urged his followers to "scourge" political preachers back to their pulpits. Anticlericalism amalgamated these three topics—history, government, and religion—into a comprehensive, compelling, and animating vision, or culture. Nineteenth-century Texans imbibed deeply of it.

Christian activists, looking for a path into the public sphere, could not merely navigate these obstacles, they had to conquer them. Such was the experience of prohibitionists and other moral reformers as the twentieth century began. Convinced of the evils of liquor, gambling, prostitution, and other vices, Christians mobilized for reform across the South and much of the country. Time and again, however, deep-seated fears and suspicions united their opposition, sank their cause, and discredited their champions. Only when religious leaders crafted an alternative vision—a clerical vision—potent enough to challenge and overcome a crippling anticlericalism could they emerge victorious. Over several decades, they did so. Whereas the anticlerical vision relied upon the general rejection of religion in public life, Christian activists constructed an

alternative around the conviction that religion deserved a larger role in the world. They believed that ministers should be heard and heeded, that politics should bend before morality, and that history bowed before God. This was the clerical vision. It inspired generations of religious Texans to successfully articulate a noble Christian history, justify a new aggressive faith, and reconceive the possibilities of government. By applying their brand of clericalism to history, government, and God, they transformed fundamental cultural assumptions and conquered decades, even centuries, of prejudicial images and associations.

When the anticlerical vision finally collapsed, Texans lost a tradition as old as the state. Anticlerical traditions impacted public life in Texas since its very inception. In 1845 delegates met in Austin to assemble a constitution for the soon-to-be-created state of Texas. They spent nearly two months working in committees, drafting resolutions, and debating constitutional minutiae to produce a document worthy of congressional approval. The delegates spent much of that time adapting and amending the Constitution of the Republic of Texas into a proper state constitution. On July 31, their steady constitution building stumbled before a controversial subject: barring religious leaders from state government..

The Constitution of the Republic of Texas, borrowing from several states, explicitly barred “ministers of the gospel” from the state legislature and the state executive, declaring that those, “dedicated to God and the care of souls, ought not to be diverted from the great duties of their functions.”² The ensuing debate over this clause,

² Texas State Constitution, 1836, article V, section 1; Texas State Constitution, 1845, article III, section 27. The clause was also present in the constitutions of 1861 and 1866. Eight of the eleven Confederate states, three border states, and two northern states all had similar clauses in their state constitutions. See William

which occupied a day and a half of the eight-week convention, revealed the ferocious anticlericalism of nineteenth-century Texans. It demonstrated the desires of Texans for a meek and humble religion, and their willingness to use government as a shield against anything else.

When a handful of delegates tentatively challenged the proscription, its future perhaps seemed uncertain—but even such modest objections unleashed a wave of hysterics and vitriol that testified to the clause’s intractable roots. “I would ask you,” a delegate from Galveston inquired, in reference to a preacher potentially winning state office, “if our Savior were again on earth, to judge and pass sentence upon these men mixing in the turmoil and business of the world, would he call them Christians?” He seemingly would not: worldly fervor, political engagement, and public issues lured religious leaders towards apostasy. “If they are false teachers,” he warned, “and they alone wish to mingle in the strifes and passions of the world, they can do nothing but evil and not a particle of good.”³ For most Texans, the only legitimate religion stressed individualism and a spiritual “otherworldliness”—a worldly Christianity was hardly Christianity at all. But beneath support for a docile brand of evangelical Christianity lurked a deep-seated, almost instinctual aversion to religious power.

Grounded in various views of history, government, and religion, anticlerical Texans reacted swiftly and intensely to any hints of politicized religion. If ministers were not constrained, one delegate asked, “may not hordes of clergy come here until the institutions of the country may be sapped in their foundations and overturned before we are aware of the danger?” Another agreed: “Their power is too deeply seated.” Limits

Silverman, “The Exclusion of Clergy from Political Office in American States: An Oddity in Church-State Relations, *Sociology of Religion* 2 (Summer 2000), 223-230.

³ William F. Weeks, *Debates of the Texas Convention* (Houston: J. W. Cruger, 1846), 171-172.

were necessary, a man from Colorado County believed, “for the sake of political security.” Even James Pinckney Henderson, soon to become Texas’s first governor, promoted explicit legal limitations because, he argued, “I consider in doing so I am protecting the great mass of the freemen of the country in their rights.” Nineteenth-century Texans respected southern evangelicalism but they fretted over activist clerics. Texans felt that religion and public life, as one argued, “are things which must ever run in parallel lines, which being produced ever so far must never meet.”⁴

Even many clergy endorsed such sentiments. R. E. B. Baylor, renowned among early Texas Baptists, himself admitted that “priests and kings, the former of every denomination, not the Catholic alone, have conspired in all countries and nations to enslave mankind.”⁵ It was simply too risky to allow clergy into the hallways of power. “Let a passion arise in the bosoms of these men acting under this fancied inspiration,” warned James Love of Galveston, “and you cannot tell the consequences.” Laws, elections, courts, government: Texans were eager to insulate them from religious leaders—the spiritual shepherds who themselves agreed to the insulation. Texas religion conformed to the pressures of anticlericalism by borrowing heavily from traditional southern evangelicalism: proper religion consisted of the personal relationship between individuals and Jesus Christ. Everything else, it seemed, only lured the righteous farther from redemption.

The constitutional proscription of minister’s political power was, needless to say, maintained and during its reign elected ministers were in fact removed from the

⁴ Ibid., 165 (first and second quotations), 186 (Henderson quotations).

⁵ Ibid., 163.

legislature.⁶ Only when a Reconstruction government ratified a new constitution—in 1869—were the political restrictions finally lifted. But the significance of the proscription extended beyond constitutional law and legislative minutiae: it testified to Texans' abhorrence of politicized religion. As one frustrated delegate complained, "Were I disposed to play the demagogue, I would know which side to take, and I know that to be on the popular side, I must unite in crying out against church and state."⁷ In later decades, moral reformers succeeded only by actively reversing what it meant "to be on the popular side." The dominance of prohibition in early-twentieth-century Texas politics testified to that emerging transformation.

Scholars have long noted how, in its decades-spanning career as a political issue, prohibition enflamed endemic ethnic and racial tensions, magnified class divisions, and complicated evolving gender norms.⁸ But the political reign of the liquor question testified to another profound development: the maturing of a clerical vision—the underlying, motivating worldview of religious politics.

To win the political war for prohibition, religious leaders had to wage larger and more abstract battles over history, government, and religion. The anticlerics clung to their well-worn ways, bolstered by deep-seated visions of witch burnings and longings for secular government. But by the late nineteenth century, a community of religious activists nurtured and then spread their own innovative vision. Anxious not merely to shepherd prohibition through the political system, they wanted more. They wanted a larger stake in

⁶ Daniel Parker, an anti-missionary Baptist leader, was elected to the Congress of the Republic of Texas in 1839 and took his seat on November 11. He was removed on November 14. The House Committee of Privileges and Elections unanimously ruled that Parker "is a minister of the gospel, and as such is not entitled to a seat in this house." Dan B. Wimberly, "Daniel Parker: Pioneer Preacher and Political Leader," Ph. D. Dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1995, 244.

⁷ Ibid., 183.

⁸ For Texas, see especially Walter L. Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 114-116, 180-181.

the public life of Texas, the American South, and, ultimately, the entire nation. To that end, to legitimate their ambitions, the clerical champions created their own usable past, redefined the scope of proper government, and justified their religious beliefs. Theirs was a battle over the soul of American culture. Their weapons were not mere politics, and their battlegrounds not mere elections. Instead, clerics fought over the bedrock principles of turn-of-the-century Americans. Both broad and fundamental, only they could nurture the sustained commitment necessary to wage the clerical crusade. These elemental assumptions included history, and not the past as it was merely, but as it would be remembered and acted upon by common men and women, or what an avalanche of scholarship has now called “historical memory.”⁹ Neither side sought a strictly factual accounting of the past. They wanted something usable. Clerics and anticlerics, as will be shown, usually fought fictions with fictions, or at least caricatures and hyperbole with hopeful exaggerations. Nevertheless, however factually flawed, from these ideas flowed ardent passions and committed action. Prohibition succeeded not only because of shrewd politicking, but quite simply because the Christian vision triumphed. It conquered the tired images of Salem witches and medieval tyrants and legitimized the mission of moral reformers. But that victory was never easy and certainly never assured. Surveying the strength of the anticlerical vision in the eighteenth century and its survival into the early twentieth, the clerical crusaders truly fulfilled a “long contract.”

“The spirit of ’76 still lives in the hearts of the people of Texas,” one hopeful anticleric, Otis Bowyer, wrote in 1911. A fiercely fought prohibition election dominated headlines that year, just as one had the year before and intermittently in the years before

⁹ For Texas, see especially Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hayes Turner (eds.), *Lone Star Pasts: Memory and History in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007).

that and as they would for the rest of the decade. But Bowyer's invocation of national lore had nothing to do with alcohol or the vast political questions swirling around it in those years, at least not directly. According to Bowyer, the nation's founding "spirit" survived because Texans and other Americans "are deeply attached to the doctrine of religious liberty," and "they are just as determined in their opposition to ecclesiastical aggression." To such men, in such moments of political and religious ferment, the most hallowed moment in American history inspired but one legacy: the muzzling of aggressive religion.¹⁰

For Bowyer, as for legions of anti-prohibitionists: the prohibition question was not about liquor, saloons, or drunkenness, but rather the security of sacred freedoms. Opposing reform became a fight-to-the-death battle for the preservation of rights and liberties. Anti-prohibitionists ("antis") drew upon a historical memory that framed their conflict in easy terms, conferred gravity to their position, and offered clear villains. The antis, proclaimed one supporter, battled against "centuries of prejudice and all the power of the church."¹¹ Anticlerical Texans drew upon a font of such preconception and prejudice to suppress all but a spiritual Christian ministry. Grounded in such ideas, fears came easily and resistance naturally.

In 1887, in a typical speech opposing the first substantial push for statewide prohibition in Texas, State Senator J. O. Terrell evoked the specter of theocracy. Referring to church and state, Terrell claimed "each has its appropriate sphere of action, and when either invades the province of the other we are taught by its consequences, in

¹⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, May 21, 1911.

¹¹ Ormond Paget to Bertrand Adoue, "Report for the Month of August, 1907." Alexander Dienst Collection, 1784-1929, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

the light of history, that a step toward tyranny has been taken.”¹² This oft-recycled rhetoric spanned generations. Nearly thirty years later, against still-striving prohibitionist preachers, the anti line had changed little. “It is one of the ironies of fate that a preacher may become a scandal as well as a glory to civilization,” Peter Radford and W. D. Lewis, leaders of the anti-prohibitionist Farmers’ Union, wrote in one typical speech.¹³ They denounced “the embezzlement of power on the part of the ministry in the present age” and warned, in the light of history, for liberty loving Texans to guard the line between church and state.¹⁴ The hyperbole and the allusions to fate and the “the light of history” exposed the stakes: in a parochial political battle, the world hung in the balance.

Anticlerical imaginations ran wild. Otis Bowyer, an attorney, believed religious fanatics sought the enchainment of humanity. “Those engaged in forging these fetters had better pause and reflect,” he wrote, for “the final result is not hard to foresee and foretell.”¹⁵ He was right: apocalyptic fears came easily to anxious Texans. One anticleric’s indictment of what he called “churchism” was typical: “always and everywhere it appeals to the supernatural to keep mankind in bondage, and it creates a ruling caste to govern their consciences, lives, and fortunes.”¹⁶ This shared nightmare united the anticlerics in sustained resistance.

Such fears, expressed so virulently against an issue that can appear so benign, revealed the deep-seated anticlericalism of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century

¹² J. O. Terrell, “Speech of Senator Terrell on the Importation, Manufacture and Sale of Alcoholic Liquors within the State,” The Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

¹³ Peter Radford and W. D. Lewis, *Down with the Bosses* (Fort Worth: Farmers’ Educational and Co-operative Union, May 25, 1914).

¹⁴ Peter Radford and W. D. Lewis, *Regulating Political Preachers* (Fort Worth: Farmers’ Educational and Co-operative Union, June 1, 1914).

¹⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, May 21, 1911.

¹⁶ D. R. Wallace, “Christianity vs. Secularization as a Factor in Nineteenth Century Civilization,” *Independent Pulpit* 4 (March, 1886), 3.

Texans. Many could never consider the issue of prohibition on its merits, for the unmistakable presence of politicking preachers and other religious Texans aroused an automatic resistance. Anticlerics' kneejerk rejection of crusading clergymen drew upon deeply rooted notions of history, government, and religion. The "old time religion" cast the activist clerics as heretics. Constitutional protections hinted at the need for active restraints. And the darkest chapters of world history implicated these same apostates in their stories. This last reservoir of worry—history—furnished anticlerics with their most effective images. In the historical memory of anticlerical Texans, a great series of sirens sounded to warn the present age.

The anticlerical worldview determined much of the turn to history. Anticlerics could never reconcile their vision of enlightened civilization with the reality of a modern clerical crusade. To these men and women, the anachronistic ambitions of religious leaders simply should not have existed in the modern world. "The United States is probably the only civilized country of the globe where the question of Prohibition is being agitated at the present day," J. D. Shaw speculated in *The Independent Pulpit*.¹⁷ To resolve this paradox, anticlerics looked backward. Prohibitionists must be historical orphans, they assumed, the weakened-but-still-dangerous spawn of a once-dominant historical movement. One supporter of the anticlerical governor Oscar Colquitt attached to his correspondence a sketch of a diminutive minister fighting the hands of a clock. The religious reformer, he wrote, "tries to reverse the time—back to the middle ages [and to] when the blue laws were enforced in New England."¹⁸ Such sentiments revealed the power of historical memory among anxious Texans. The steady articulation of such a

¹⁷ J. D. Shaw, "Prohibition," *Independent Pulpit* 5 (April, 1887), 40.

¹⁸ H. W. Stroter to O. B. Colquitt, January 30, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers, 1873-1941, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

memory and its continued resonance nourished generations of anticlerical resistance. A look at the rhetoric reveals why.

“Let history speak,” wrote one reader of the *Independent Pulpit*. “The world has known no tyranny like it, no tyrants like church tyrants.”¹⁹ According to such beliefs, the pages of history teemed with religious crimes. “Ecclesiastical intimidation,” a doctor from Thornton wrote, “has been repeating itself in all ages of the world’s history.” The anticlerical lawyer Otis Bowyer agreed: “Religious fanaticism has been the curse of every age and clime, and, like a simoom [desert storm], it blasts and withers all it touches.”²⁰ To such men, the burden of history rested upon their shoulders. Civilization demanded their vigilance. This was the anticlerical vision: politicized preachers fighting for a benighted past, anticlerics fighting for an enlightened future.

A catalog of specific historical references confronted anticlerics with a frightening immediacy. The Dark Ages, Puritan New England, “Mohammedans”: the mere hint of politicized Christianity instantly triggered these images. A clergyman commenting on political issues in a local newspaper, a minister running for local office, a preacher’s public speech against saloon licensing: on came the suspicions and fears of generations. When such isolated events became commonplace, as in the heat of a prohibition election, anticlerical history lessons became unavoidable.

In a typical speech, one prominent San Antonio anti, B. P. Hintze, recalled the unparalleled power and enlightened splendor of ancient Greece and Rome and then spoke of their quick and subsequent decay. “What was the cause?” he asked. Certainly his audience knew before he even answered, for the idea of the Dark Ages weighed heavily

¹⁹ Wallace, “Christianity vs. Secularization,” 4.

²⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, May 21, 1911.

on the minds of anxious Texans. Besides, men such as J. D. Shaw and his *Independent Pulpit* published such lessons weekly: “It was the union of politics and religion that destroyed the civilization of the Greeks and Romans, and brought on the Dark Ages,” Shaw wrote. “There followed an age so dark, so insane, so cruel, so bloody, that the world will not wash out its stains for ten thousand years to come,” Hintze lectured. “Down through those long, dark centuries the prince and the priest came hand in hand like two giant robbers and murderers.”²¹

For such Texans, religious fanaticism blackened an entire era of Western history. “For thousands of years the human family had been governed and mis-governed, oppressed, plundered, and destroyed,” Congressman Roger Mills said.²² “Civilization stood still, the arts and sciences dragged along like snails, knowledge was kept concealed in her hiding places.” Hintze, the anti-prohibitionist, charged that “for a thousand years this world was so insane about the next world that no man of the age was brave and sane enough to write the history of the period.”²³ J. D. Shaw blamed religious tyranny for “the numerous massacres and wars that blackened the history of European civilization from the time of Constantine to the present.”²⁴ In the anticlerical vision, the curse of the West loomed ominously.

Such rhetoric, of course, bludgeons the reader with obvious anti-Catholicism. Recurring allusions to “priests” and “Romanism” were no accident: the Catholic image was a useful one. As Justin Nordstrom’s recent *Danger on the Doorstep* reveals, anti-

²¹ B. P. Hintze, “Liquor and Law,” speech delivered in San Antonio, January 15, 1909. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers, 1873-1941.

²² R. Q. Mills, “Speech of the Hon. R. Q. Mills before the United Anti-Prohibition clubs of Corsicana, Texas, Saturday, May 21, 1887” The Texas Collection.

²³ Hintze, “Liquor and Law.”

²⁴ J. D. Shaw, “Politics and Religion,” *Independent Pulpit* 4 (July 1886), 119.

Catholicism infected national culture. Progressive Era Americans consumed mountains of anti-Catholic literature.²⁵ And if an oppressive national mood was not enough, Texas's unique history and geography fortified such sentiments. Memories of Mexico and its jealous church laws colored Texas's origins story and contemporaries breathed the revolutionary anti-Catholicism then emanating across the border.²⁶ Ethnic associations and prejudice—Texas's sizable Catholic population was overwhelmingly Hispanic and German—only added stimulus to the creation of a vitriolic anti-Catholicism. For anticlerical Texans, then, Catholicism stood for the slavish, premodern hierarchies of king and priest. When such men and women reached for the appropriate images, the Catholic would come readily to mind.

Generations of anticlerical Texans habitually fell back upon a variety of specific images. The Dark Ages were one, Catholics another. But with reliable frequency, references to the Middle East, Muslims, and the prophet Mohammed interspersed anticlerical rhetoric. "The real sure enough prohibitionist is the Mohammedan," Texas Governor Oscar Colquitt argued in 1911. "They spread their church over a good part of Asia, and all of Egypt and Palestine, and threatened Europe, but they did it under the principle of prohibition—by force, with fire and sword."²⁷ To many Texans, religious fanaticism adequately explained the supposed decay of Middle Eastern civilizations. "The Turks were once a powerful and progressive people," but, J. O. Terrell said, "after centuries of total abstinence, look at their physical and moral decay." Or look farther east,

²⁵ Justin Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep: Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

²⁶ See especially the April 2009 special issue of *The Americas* on "Personal Enemies of God: Anticlericals and Anticlericalism in Revolutionary Mexico, 1915-1940."

²⁷ Oscar Colquitt, Untitled Speech delivered at Palestine, Texas, on July 13, 1911. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers, 1873-1941.

he suggested, and “cast your eyes on the Brahmins, of India, where you find the very paradise of prohibition, for they neither drink wine nor eat meat; behold a race physically, morally and intellectually degenerate—the murderers of girl children and the burners of widows.”²⁸ Hyperbole, certainly, but such rhetoric nakedly exposed the virulent reactions of anticlerical Texans.

Texans looked closer to home for their history lessons as well. They found in Puritan New England the real possibility of an American theocracy. For J. O. Terrell, the interest in prohibitory laws conjured up seventeenth-century New England and “the witch-burning times.” Instinctively suspicious of aggressive Christianity, Terrell could only assume that “this doctrine of prohibition had its birth in the same inhospitable clime where witches were burned.”²⁹ In 1914 Radford and Lewis, the current and former presidents of the Texas Farmers’ Union, attacked prohibitionist preachers as the most recent manifestation of an intractable religious intolerance. “Our pilgrim fathers met it,” they wrote, “when, through the influence of the clergy, a witch court was established at Salem, Mass., in 1692 that precipitated a legal holocaust, threatening to reduce the population to ashes.” As usual, such anticlerical Texans read history as a call for vigilance. Just as then, contemporary threats could be “extinguished by the laymen uniting and forcing their preachers back to the pulpit.”³⁰

Insurgent clerics anticipated the Puritans’ powerful hold over historical memory. At the outset of McLennan County’s disastrous local-option campaign in 1885, Baptist leader B. H. Carroll captured the cleric’s lament with his colorful prediction: “All over

²⁸ Terrell, “Speech of Senator Terrell on the Importation, Manufacture and Sale of Alcoholic Liquors within the State.”

²⁹ Terrell, “Speech of Senator Terrell.”

³⁰ Radford and Lewis, *Regulating Political Preachers*.

the field, as if from all the frogs of Egypt, and in every note, from the shrillest octave to the hoarsest bass,” he predicted, “will come the croaking: Blue light, blue light, Mayflower, Mayflower, crank, crank, fanatic, fanatic!”³¹ He anticipated instinctive and intractable fears. The backlash, he knew, would come. The anticlerics, he seemed to be saying, needed no learned discourses or complicated arguments. They could speak in easy epithets, as if by rote, for such words expressed generations of fears and suspicions, a whole idiom buried deep within Texas minds. The anticlerical counterattack needed no articulation, although it would indeed be articulated. Reaction, not reflection, trampled the first great clerical offensives in Texas history. The triumph of clericalism required the conquest of these images. It required fashioning a new history with a new usable set of images easily employed by legions of crusading clergymen and their allies. But history is never isolated in human minds. Anticlerical conceptions of history bled into anticlerical conceptions of good government. It defined the mission of the United States, in the past and in the present, and posed yet another obstacle to the triumph of the clerical vision.

Looking backward over a history of inquisitions and witch burnings, anticlerical Texans regarded the American nation as a bright exception to a long and predacious darkness. In the anticlerical vision, the United States repudiated a past that ebbed and flowed on the power of kings and priests. It was out of the despotism of the Dark Ages and the tyranny of Salem churches, anticlerics held, that America arose and its Constitution was written. If history grounded the anticlerical vision, a unique understanding of the United States gave it meaning. Future senator Roger Q. Mills claimed that “our government was created to secure personal, civil, political and religious

³¹ *Galveston Daily News*, August 20, 1885, quoted in James D. Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley: The Southern Strategy of Texas Prohibitionists in the 1880s* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003), 39.

liberty,” that “these were new principles,” and that “they had been denied by Kings and Priests through the whole history of the human family.” “The makers of the Constitution,” Governor Colquitt later lectured, “well knew the difficulties of allowing church and state to intermingle in the exercise of civil and religious authority.”³² This was the American legacy, they believed, bequeathed unto the present day by Washington and Jefferson and all the enlightened men and women of the past. It had survived, and survived still, owing only to the diligence of the founders’ successors. It was not their battle alone, but instead the struggle of all American heroes throughout all of American history. Antiprohibitionists were linked to more than just the founders.

One nostalgic retired attorney from College Station wrote Governor Colquitt to relate a story about Andrew Jackson he had heard from a professor in Lebanon, Tennessee. The president, the attorney said, had been close to a certain minister as a young man. When Jackson became president, the same minister visited him in the White House and asked for a political appointment. In the attorney’s third-hand account, the president said “Mr. Walker, I thought you were a minister of the gospel.” The minister confirmed that indeed he was, whereupon the president replied, “Then is it possible that you have come to ask an appointment to an office at my hands, and thus quit the high, noble, pure calling of a minister of God, the breaker & distributor of the bread of life eternal unto dying souls? If this be true Mr. Walker you have falled [sic] too low to receive any official gist at my hands. You are unworthy.” The attorney indicted the whole of the prohibition movement with the same crime. “I honestly trust you will clean up and wipe out the whole combination,” he wrote.³³ For this was history to the anticlerical

³² Colquitt, “Untitled Speech delivered at Palestine, Texas”

³³ W. R. Cavitt to O. B. Colquitt, February 12, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers, 1873-1941.

Texan: an unequivocal indictment of politicized religion. And such was good government: a safeguard against preachers' lust for power. The two worked in dialectic, together with suspicions of active religion, to forge the anticlerical vision upon which effective political resistance depended.

The intermingling of history, government, and religion crystallized during prohibition elections. There, the anticlerical vision was expressed, its supporters united, and its leaders rewarded. The acute anticlericalism of the 1880s is illustrative. When Senator Coke and Congressmen Mills told cheering crowds to "scourge back" political preachers, and that hell was already full of them anyway, they spoke a distinct language that expressed a specific culture of definite images.³⁴ Anticlerical Texans could believe that voting against prohibition upheld the injunctions of the founding fathers, that they acted in defense of progress and civilization, that they personally helped bolster liberty and conscience against tyranny and superstition.

As public figures drew so profitably from anticlerical fears, the clerical revolution quietly transformed the region's spiritual life. Like the age's railroads, meatpacking plants, and steel mills, churches boomed. Part-time preachers meeting in multi-purpose meeting houses became full-time professionals presiding over wealthy urban congregations in sky-piercing stone churches. Memberships soared, money flowed in, and denominations expanded. Higher salaries and greater visibility imparted a growing prestige upon religious leaders.³⁵ When religious leaders sought the means to reassert their moral authority and found it in moral reform, they developed their own alternative

³⁴ *Galveston Daily News*, August 30, 1885.

³⁵ See especially Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

culture.³⁶ Yet when they spoke out, the anticlerical vision drowned them in the images of religious despotism and historical tyranny. To counteract such poisonous associations, religious activists constructed their own usable set of historical, political, and religious assumptions.

Over the course of decades, religious Texans developed a vivid counter-vision to justify their public ambitions. As that vision spread throughout an ever-expanding constituency, the anticlerical consensus slowly unraveled. More and more Texans assumed that history lay with the clerical insurgency, that government could—and should—be run along Christian lines, and, above all, that proper religion sanctioned the clerical crusade. Over time, those ideas assumed greater urgency and acquired a devastating potency. It began with history.

In 1872 Homer Thrall published his *History of Methodism in Texas*, still perhaps the authoritative account of the Methodist Church in early Texas. Thrall called his work “an unpretending volume” that “hardly aspires to the dignity of a history,” and, time and again, humbly stressed its insularity. He limited himself to the struggles of his denomination and rejected any grandiose claims to Texas history. Thrall’s struggles were spiritual. He wrote of personal piety and of bringing souls to Christ, not wars or politics or other matters. His was an account of conferences, camp meetings, church foundings, and Bible societies. For Thrall and traditional religious leaders, religion was a cloistered world disconnected from its secular surroundings.³⁷ That Thrall published his history at

³⁶ This process is perhaps best described in Ted Ownby’s *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), and in Gaines Foster’s *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

³⁷ Homer S. Thrall, *History of Methodism in Texas* (Houston, E. H. Cushing, 1872), 3.

all, of course, and that it was read widely, sounded the coming of the clerical vision. But Thrall's characteristic humility contrasted with the coming flood of religious scholarship.

Z. N. Morrell published his autobiography the same year that Thrall's denominational history appeared. If Thrall's humility aligned him with tradition, Morrell's self-importance foreshadowed the mainstreaming of the clerical vision. Morrell, a pioneering Baptist preacher, rejected Thrall's timidity. He confronted history, Christianized it, and gloried in his triumph. In his account, and others that would follow, the distance between the spiritual and the temporal narrowed. "My personal history in Texas," Morrell wrote, "is interwoven with the state of society and the rise and progress of civilization and religion." The history of Texas was incomplete without such men as he. "My purpose," he wrote, "has simply been to lay the foundation for the historian."³⁸ Religious Texans devoured Morrell's unified history. Drawn to the diminished distance between faith and society, they eagerly read about settlement, Texas independence, Indian wars, and other thrilling scenes—all presided over by their religious Ulysses. Morrell's work went through three editions. The first, of a thousand copies, reportedly sold out in weeks.³⁹ Baylor University president William Carey Crane, struggling to sustain his infant institution, drew inspiration from the "thrilling scenes depicted by Z. N. Morrell" and urged others to do the same.⁴⁰

As such men reinterpreted religion's role in the world, they turned to history. In the second half of the nineteenth century, religious activists confronted the past as if, as their elementary pronouncements suggested, for the first time. "Events give character to

³⁸ Z. N. Morrell, *Flowers and Fruits from the Wilderness; or, Thirty-Six Years in Texas and Two in Honduras*, (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1872), v-vi.

³⁹ Morrell, vii.

⁴⁰ William Carey Crane, *Centennial Address Embracing the History of Washington County, Texas, at the Fair Grounds in Brenham, July 4, 1876* (Galveston: News Steam Job Printing Office, 1876).

time,” lectured Crane, the prominent Baptist educator, for “without events years would pass away without lessons; without epochs; dark, black and chaotic.” Their success or failure hinged on the ownership of events. During their disastrous political campaigns, men such as B. H. Carroll witnessed firsthand the damage wrought by a hostile history. They grasped its power. To sustain their movement, then, these new clerical leaders pursued the creation of a purified past. A new history, they believed, could legitimate their mission, fortify their standing, and lead them to victory. “Hence,” Crane said, “we look about us for memorials of passing time and monuments of illustrious deeds.”⁴¹ And so, before religious leaders reformed society’s morals, they reformed its past.

Of course, if the creation of a Christian vision sounds conspiratorial, it was not. New religious histories were not being crafted in memory factories by conniving clerics. Rather, they emerged naturally from the anxieties and concerns of turn-of-the-century religious leaders. The promotion of the Christian vision inevitably imparted meaning upon the lives of its champions. Faith could be enthroned, and they could be the ones to accomplish it. Confronted by steadily strengthening hints of a New South, these angst-ridden parsons found solace in a simple idea: that they were not worthless, that they had a role in the world, and that the burdens of their faith dictated action. The first clerics, in Texas just as in the South and much of the rest of the nation, rooted themselves in their nascent Christian vision and found comfort. Over time, as they acted to effect their clerical dreams, they developed and expanded their vision to include clearly articulated ideas about history, politics, and faith. These refined ideas were not cynical or duplicitous, but, instead, the authentic expression of a new generation of religious leaders hungering to redeem their new world. As they sallied forth into the public realm in

⁴¹ Crane, *Centennial Address Embracing the History of Washington County, Texas*.

pursuit of prohibition and other moral reforms, it was this clerical vision that sustained them, that provided solace in defeat and jubilation in victory. It was the indispensable element of the clerical crusade. And as moral reform advanced, the vision matured.

Religious activists sensed that religion's centrality in the coming order of things depended upon a usable past, and they set about furnishing one. Like Morrell and Thrall, they laid the foundation with the publication of denominational histories and historical journals and biographies of the great evangelists (and autobiographies of those who imagined themselves as such). In 1909, for instance, Methodists formed the Texas Methodist Historical Association with the explicit goal of reemphasizing their denomination's role in Texas history. "In writing the history of a State, it is too often the case that a superficial view is taken of the factors that contributed to its development," wrote Reverend John H. McLean, the association's inaugural president. "The soldier and statesman are sure—but seldom is mention made of the education and formative influences of the pulpit, the religious press, Christian education, and the Christian home."⁴² The churches were prepared to insert themselves into the forefront of the past as they looked for the means to accomplish the same in the present. Such works provided an idealized past filled with righteous warriors and pioneering preachers, heroes sufficient to refute and replace anticlerical memories of tyrannical priests and runaway Puritanism. Religious reformers would no longer be historical orphans, some anachronistic sickness to be quarantined. Rather, they would be the culmination of history, the fulfillment of a holy lineage. As Senator Morris Sheppard later said before a group of Texas Methodists,

⁴² Rev. John H. McLean, "Introduction," *Texas Methodist Historical Quarterly*, 1 (July, 1909), 4-5.

“the song that ripples on the lips of Clio, muse of history, is a song that sounds our eternal charge.”⁴³

As prohibition and other moral reforms matured, their champions increasingly challenged the anticlerical version of history. “The next fellow who stands on a Texas platform and introduces that ghost of Washington’s day to scare the people away,” a prominent prohibitionist, H. A. Ivy, wrote, “ought to dress himself in knee breeches with buckles, a powdered wig and other habiliments of colonial times, to enhance the humor of the farce.”⁴⁴ Such men rejected a tainted history of corruption, excess, and oppression. Instead, motivated clerics began to articulate their own ideas. They imagined themselves as participants in a transhistorical movement. They Christianized secular heroes, and they recast the proper boundaries separating church and government.

To the Texas clerics articulating this new vision, the whole of history vindicated their struggle. Religious leaders believed themselves the inheritors of a righteous tradition and therefore the bearers of some transcendent responsibility. They looked into the past and felt compelled to act in the present, as if beholden to some holy commission, something “behind the superficial changes in forms of government, the coalition of tribes and nations, [and] the rise and decline of empires,” as Senator Sheppard explained.⁴⁵ Whatever it was, the editor of the *Baptist Standard*, J. B. Gambrell, wrote that “it does not turn its course at the command of kings, governors or presidents,”⁴⁶ but was instead, in Sheppard’s words, “the one movement that has steadily grown throughout the ages.”

⁴³ Senator Sheppard, “Religion and the American Republic,” speech delivered at State Line Methodist Church, Texarkana, on September 2, 1934. Morris Sheppard Papers, 1894-1953, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁴⁴ H. A. Ivy, *Rum on the Run in Texas: A Brief History of Prohibition in the Lone Star State* (Dallas: Temperance Pub. Co., 1910), 68.

⁴⁵ Shepard to Dear Madam, September 30, 1912. Morris Sheppard Papers, 1894-1953.

⁴⁶ “Address issued by Dr. Gambrell,” February 1, 1914, Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers, 1873-1941.

Religious leaders embraced it and the self-regard it conferred. They saw themselves, as never before, as humanity's true guardians. Gambrell articulated this new ethos in the pages of his *Baptist Standard*. "We should proceed now, as always," he wrote, "under the compelling conviction that we hold the truth in trust for the world."⁴⁷ Holding the truth in trust for the world: clerics embraced that idea, and the burden of action that followed.

As heirs to a commission, activist religious leaders lashed out. "It is the business of Christianity," J. B. Gambrell wrote, "to hurt what is morally wrong, and promote what is socially right. Paul went after Peter when he was wrong. Christianity is a corrective, not a mere coddler." Reformers had no need of a strictly otherworldly brand of evangelicalism and moved beyond the traditional emphasis on personal conversion and an individual's relationship with Jesus Christ. They believed in a fighting faith, one whose "normal condition," Gambrell said, "is that of the most powerful militant factor in civilization."⁴⁸ Christians in Texas, the South, and throughout the nation, such men believed, had to be roused to action. "What we must do, my friends," Morris Sheppard later remarked to a Methodist congregation in Texarkana, "is to labor for the placement of God and religion at the head of all human activity." So doing, Sheppard believed, "we shall deserve to hear on mortal shores as well as shores immortal a great Amen, suggestive of approval on the party of deity of our efforts for mankind."⁴⁹ But to win political support, they would need to enlist the aid of history and its heroes. This imperative could trample traditional religious divisions.

⁴⁷ J. B. Gambrell, "The Problem of Baptist Progress," Lee L. Campbell Papers, 1890-1919, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁴⁸ "Address Issued by Dr. Gambrell."

⁴⁹ Senator Sheppard, "Religion and the American Republic."

The clerical vision proved so intoxicating, and its articulation so imperative, that conventional prejudice could stumble. Prohibitionists were no strangers to the cheap anti-Catholicism peddled by the anticlerics: many viewed Catholics with disdain.⁵⁰ The publisher of the *Baptist Standard* and a dedicated prohibitionist, James Cranfill, introduced a resolution at the Southern Baptist Convention of 1894 with such declarations as “we view with grave concern the aggressions of the papal power and its manifest design to dominate this country” and “we believe it our duty as Baptists to resist the encroachment of Romanism in all of its forms.”⁵¹ But the clerical crusade—and the sizable strength of the state’s Catholic voters—increasingly blurred such prejudice. Prohibitionists published tracts by Catholic writers and arranged speaking engagements for priests, some of whom breathed deeply of the clerical vision and could neatly enunciate the historical, political, and religious sensibilities so ardently championed by their Protestant contemporaries.

In 1906 Reverend Father James M. Hayes of Dallas celebrated the 130th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence with a special service at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. Speaking on “American patriotism,” Hayes reckoned “worthy indeed is such a subject of the pulpit of the Church of God!” Though he explicitly declared himself against a “union” of church and state, Hayes went to absurd lengths to finesse the issue. “Because I believe in the Church, and because I believe in the State,” he said, “I believe that Church and State should work in harmonious relationship for the glory of God and for the emancipation and elevation of men.” Hayes, a Catholic,

⁵⁰ It was a northern Presbyterian minister and prohibitionist who attacked Democrats in 1884 as the party of “rum, Romanism, and rebellion.” That charge, as far as the first two labels were concerned, may have hit too close to home for religious southerners: a generation later they led the southern exodus from the Democratic, Catholic antiprohibitionist Al Smith in the presidential election of 1928.

⁵¹ *Dallas Morning News*, May 15, 1894.

was among the mass of Christian activists reconceiving the relationship between the Christian church and American government. The state had nothing to fear, such believers argued. As Hayes said, “There is no conflict between the American flag and the cross of Christ.”⁵²

Hayes’s assertions that “our American nation is the greatest on earth” and “it has been raised up by Divine Providence” were, in the long history of American Christian pronouncements, fairly pedestrian. Reading God’s will into American history was nothing new. But Hayes and the articulators of the Christian vision went beyond a providential view of American history and found, in a new vision, historical sanction for their aims. The past justified more than their faith: it licensed and compelled their actions in pursuit of the Christian vision. They began quoting the Founders favorably (perhaps none more than George Washington and his farewell address’s invocation of “religion and morality” as “indispensable supports” for the nation’s political endurance). “The Republic must draw its life from the religion and morality of its citizens,” Hayes said, echoing such sentiments.” Christianity, the rock of ages, was now the rock of the nation, the foundation for history’s greatest success. Because, Hayes said, “in God we trust. It has been so from the beginning, it is so now, and may it be so until the end. With trust in God and with confidence in the people America shall endure.” Although Hayes’s Catholicism set him apart from many of his clerical contemporaries—Catholicism and the largely Protestant prohibition movement coexisted in tension—his ideas put him squarely in the mainstream of the emerging Christian vision.⁵³

⁵² *Dallas Morning News*, July 9, 1906.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

At every opportunity, religious leaders gathered to dictate a new shared Christian history. They successfully produced an insular tradition of righteous church leaders, but an effective Christian vision still required something more. Its communicators needed popular ideals and popular figures to work for them. Rescuing the founders and inscribing Christianity in the nation's founding was an obvious first step, but Texans and their peculiar attachment to their own mythology demanded another. As typical episodes involving the titans of Texas history reveal, they set about sacralizing their state's secular heroes.

In 1893, Baylor University president Rufus C. Burleson spoke in the House of Representatives to honor the one-hundredth anniversary of Sam Houston's birth. He delivered a speech intended to fully Christianize the Texas hero. Combining equal parts sermon and history lecture, Burleson laid into his task. He illuminated the three formative influences in Houston's life. First he listed Houston's mother, her maternal gifts, and her abiding faith. Next came his teacher, a Dr. Anderson, a mind-opening influence who taught Houston to learn from himself, from books, "and above all, with God, the father of light." Books were the last influence on the Texas hero, and none more so than the Bible, Burleson said. But that worthy trinity, of course, only facilitated the one greater, overshadowing influence. As Burleson told it, "the crowning glory and power of all the formative influences was his firm and ever abiding faith in God as an all-wise and ever present Heavenly Father." This great faith protected Houston and authored his greatness.

“This was his anchor of hope on the dark and stormy ocean,” Burleson said, “this was his Gibraltar when assailed by a thousand adversities.”⁵⁴

Transforming the rambunctious, rambling, part-time Cherokee into an exemplar of the Christian religion was a stretch, but Burleson spoke from some first-hand knowledge. In the twilight of his life, Houston, in part to appease his pious wife, decided to publicly accept membership in the Baptist Church. As a young preacher at Independence, Burleson had had the honor of baptizing the old war hero in 1854. (“Well, General,” a friend is supposed to have said later, “I hear your sins are washed away,” to which Houston replied, “If they were all washed away, the Lord help the fish down below.”)⁵⁵ But if Burleson whitewashed one Texas hero, another minister completely reinvented another.

In 1910, in a bizarre ritual involving the “Father of Texas,” patriotic Texans exhumed Stephen F. Austin’s remains from a Brazoria County cemetery, paraded them through the state by railroad, and reinterred them in the State Cemetery in Austin some days later. At this reburial, the eulogizing minister, Dr. R. J. Briggs of the First Congregational Church of Austin, lauded the deistic Austin as a “God-chosen and God-inspired man.” Briggs implored the state’s “young men and women” to act: “This heritage is now descending to you from the hands of those who have so faithfully guarded it through the generations now passing from the stage of action. Will you be faithful to it?” For Briggs the Congregationalist, as for Burleson the Baptist, as for the

⁵⁴ Rufus Burleson, *Address of Dr. Rufus C. Burleson, on the one Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Gen. Sam Houston, and the Fifty-Seventh of the Independence of Texas, Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives, at Austin, Texas, March 2, 1893* (Austin: Ben C. Jones & Co., 1893).

⁵⁵ See James L. Haley, *Sam Houston* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004) and Ernest C. Shearer “Sam Houston and Religion” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 20 (March 1961). For quotations, see Haley, 333.

whole clerical crusade: history was an exhortation. It was the engine of an active church and an empowering legacy for contemporary religion. “Renew the fires of your enthusiasm,” Briggs urged, “baptize the coming generations in the glorious traditions of your history.”⁵⁶ Christian activists already were. And out of those traditions would emerge a new vision for the present.

Activists now linked themselves to tradition. As the well-known Baptist leader George Truett declared in 1911, beleaguered crusaders “will remember their fathers and by such memory they will be inspired to bravest and unfainting endeavor.”⁵⁷ Of prohibition campaigns, Senator Morris Sheppard wrote “these contests will mark a distinct epoch in the struggle for righteousness in human government.” Religious activists saw their struggle in the light of a history distinct from the anticlerics’, one that granted no novelty to their reforms. “It is a struggle as old as human history,” Sheppard explained. “From the primeval fall man has been warring with the power that led him first to disobey his God.” Religious leaders proudly, and without humility, deigned to restore man, once fallen, to grace. “Through centuries of murder, tyranny, drunkenness, lust and all other crimes and vices that comprise the heritage of a fallen race,” Sheppard wrote, “the yearning for righteousness in government and in conduct has never left the human heart.” Out of this connection between past and present emerged a new conception of government.

Activists rejected the anticlerical notion of government as a shield against an overstepping religion. They turned that idea on its head. Government, many came to

⁵⁶ See Gregg Cantrell, “The Bones of Stephen F. Austin: History and Memory in Progressive-Era Texas,” in *Lone Star Pasts*.

⁵⁷ George Truett, “The Coming of the Kingdom in America,” in *The Baptist World Alliance: Second Congress, Philadelphia, June 19-25, 1911* (Philadelphia: Harper & Brother Company, 1911), 421.

believe, could be a holy weapon in the hands of the righteous. The separation of church and state was a cruel fiction, they believed, and the dictates of their faith demanded that idea's abolishment. Methodist minister Robert Shuler, who later won fame in Los Angeles as the fundamentalist "Fighting Bob" Shuler, came of age in the Texas prohibition crusades. To Shuler, there never was, and never could be, church-state separation. "There has never been a great national reformation or governmental revolution that was not to some extent touched by the influence of the church," he wrote. "Christianity has ever pointed to the right in morals, society, and government."⁵⁸ Only the corrupt and sinful, Shuler insisted, feared and resisted the power of an active church. "It is the wicked that tremble and well they may tremble," he wrote, for "righteous men have no fears and need have none."⁵⁹ In turn-of-the-century Texas, clerics were indeed learning to be fearless.

In the 1870s, the inward-looking works of religious literature had proudly boasted of their limited ambitions. Men such as Thrall included, for instance, "no glorification of Methodism" and "no fulsome adulation even of those deceased."⁶⁰ How very different from what religious Texans were reading so shortly thereafter. Thrall's own Methodists, from their own denominational presses, were now producing works in droves boasting of their gloried history and their coming triumphs. "Over our moving columns a cloud of glory has hovered by day and night, and this evening we look back over a history that is little less than a continued miracle," read one bishop's collected sermons and addresses.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Robert Pierce Shuler, *The New Issue, or, Local Booze Government: Being a Collection of Articles on 'Prohibition'* (Temple, Tex.: Temple Printing and Office Appliance Co., 1911).

⁵⁹ Shuler, *The New Issue*.

⁶⁰ Thrall, *History of Methodism in Texas*, 4.

⁶¹ Charles Betts Galloway, *Great Men and Movements: A Volume of Addresses* (Dallas: Smith & Lamar, 1914), 36.

When this conceit won widespread adoption, a religious politics would be unstoppable. In the early twentieth century, the obsession with prohibition testified to that triumph.

As the decades passed, the most ardent activists drifted closer and closer toward a pure version of the Christian vision. As uncompromising as their most extreme opponents, radical clerics embraced their sacred history and supported an unfettered religion and a righteous government. Senator Morris Sheppard of Texas, a committed Methodist, embodied this commitment. Sheppard worked harder and more successfully than any other national legislator to achieve a constitutional prohibition amendment. He acted, he said, so that “man will rise ... again to be crowned with the confidence and approbation of Almighty God.”⁶² Sheppard was among the most prominent and powerful advocates of the Christian vision. He pushed early for a prohibition amendment and called it “the most solemn duty that has confronted Congress since the death of slavery.” Breathing deeply of Christian reform, Sheppard framed his crusade as a life-and-death struggle between the forces of good and evil. “The issue is plain,” he said. It would determine the fate of the nation and align the American soul, irreversibly, toward God or Satan. “We must array ourselves for a higher civilization or a lower one,” he told the U.S. Senate. The battle “will determine whether the moral forces of the Nation are the dominant ones. It will determine whether this is a Christian Nation.”⁶³ Such were the stakes: a Christian nation, the great hope of the clerical vision. The notion of a Christian nation inspired the clerical conquest and marked a turning point in the history of American religion. Grounded in visions of a Christian nation, clerics had to act.

⁶² Morris Sheppard, *Congressman Sheppard is for Prohibition* (Fort Worth: Statewide Prohibition Amendment Association Headquarters, 1911), 8.

⁶³ Morris Sheppard, *National Prohibition and States Rights* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office: 1914).

Religious leaders translated their vision into a practical political program aimed at liquor, saloons, and drunkenness. Within the churches, prohibition became gospel, and alcohol came to embody evil and all the ills of the modern world. To prohibitionists, no claim could be too drastic, no indictment too extreme. The abolition of strong drink would signal society's redemption, and remove the major impediment to realized a Christina nation.

With such unyielding zeal, the clerics marched to victory. Their numbers swelled, their organizations matured, and their battles were slowly won. In the course of their campaigns, prohibitionists deftly exploited a thousand political advantages. Denominations contained a built-in bureaucracy complete with experienced speakers, the national resurgence of the Anti-Saloon League imparted superior organizing, segregation and electoral reforms strengthened the voting power of middle-class whites, and the national mania for reform legitimated the antiliquor crusade. But the reformers' true strength lay elsewhere. Like the anticlerics, prohibitionists now believed they had history and good government on their side. They had harnessed myth and memory. They had the belief that they battled for God. This was the ultimate power of the Christian vision. Rooted in history and government and religion, the crusaders' holy commission sustained their efforts. And as the years passed, the evidence of their eventual success mounted. Even as they suffered several narrow statewide defeats, local victories were sweeping across most of the state.⁶⁴ They believed they would win. They drew strength from their certainty of triumph. "It is coming," Baylor president Samuel P. Brooks said. "It is as sure as the roll of time," the logic of "the whole trend of social growth through the

⁶⁴ Lewis L. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 32-33.

ages.”⁶⁵ The Christian vision had prepared them for nothing less, for as Senator Sheppard proclaimed, “civilization sweeps toward God.”⁶⁶

Dejected anticlerics looked on helplessly. “The very condition which our ancestors dreaded and sought to avoid is gradually creeping upon us,” lamented the attorney Otis Bowyer. As, in his words, “the statute books are being filled with ecclesiastical laws,” Texans had simply forgotten how to fear religious ambition.⁶⁷ “The present age,” State Senator Terrell said, “oblivious of the great toil and suffering which it cost to secure personal freedom and the freedom of conscience, is again urging us to return and taste the curse from which our ancestors escaped.” And what could stop it? Images like Salem, Terrell said, “have faded from the memory of men.”⁶⁸ The anticlerical vision, once so biting raw and omnipotent, was withering to nothing. It was losing its hold on Texas culture.

In 1910, a supporter of Oscar Colquitt urged the gubernatorial candidate to denounce the dry mania. “The people will love you for the enemies you make,” he wrote, alluding to a repressed anticlericalism.⁶⁹ The sentiment was not his alone, for in decades past anticlericalism had had a crushing weight. But in a culture saturated with inspired Christianity, the anticlerical vision descended ever more into obsolescence. In 1911, Dr. S. M. Carlton of Thornton, Texas, believed that “politico-religious heresy is now being preached from nearly every pulpit in Texas.”⁷⁰ Although anticlericalism still lashed clerical activists, a new culture of clericalism sustained them against their critics. By the

⁶⁵ Samuel P. Brooks, “At the Prohibition Mass Meeting,” 1885, Samuel Palmer Brooks Papers, The Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

⁶⁶ Senator Sheppard, “Religion and the American Republic.”

⁶⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, May 21, 1911.

⁶⁸ Terrell, “Speech of Senator Terrell on the Importation, Manufacture and Sale of Alcoholic Liquors within the State.”

⁶⁹ H. W. Stroter to O. B. Colquitt, January 30, 1910, Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers, 1873-1941.

⁷⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, September 23 1911.

second decade of the twentieth century, the Christian vision stood primed to sweep away the last stale vestiges of the anticlerical vision.

The Christian vision advanced in fits and starts, but over time its effects were undeniable. It convinced liberty-loving Texans that good government could tolerate, and indeed need, an undeniable Christian influence. Clerics rescued prohibition from the dustbin of history, implanted their unique ideas of history, government, and religion deep into the region's cultural memory, united religious southerners around notions of righteousness, and maneuvered politically to defeat anticlerical opponents. The triumph of the clerical vision enabled the construction of the Bible Belt. Supported by a broad and deeply seated clerical culture, religious activists marshaled a distinct religious identity, sustained their movement in the face of resistance, and changed the course of American history.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Marker of Morality: Race, Righteousness, and the Origins of the Bible Belt

Race dominates the imagination of American historians. It towers over contemporary historiography. For decades it has reigned as a dominant concern. From a sliver of the academic periphery, race has, in the words of Harvard president and historian Drew Faust, “moved to a central place within all U.S. history. ... We [historians] have recognized that issues of race characterized the entire national experience.”¹ For American historians, race is inescapable. For those studying the history of southern religion, it is especially so.

The early career of aggressive political evangelicalism overlapped with Jim Crow’s. The turn of the twentieth century witnessed both the dramatic rise of political religion and the tragic descent into racial apartheid, and yet historians have not fully understood or explained the relationship between the two. No great synthesis has emerged. Beth Schweiger, for instance, in her account of nineteenth-century evangelical Virginians, concludes only that “ambiguity suggests the complexity of race and religion even in the caustic atmosphere of Jim Crow.”² Her observation is both vague and dissatisfying—but it is correct. The relationship between race and religion, at least among turn-of-the-century southern evangelicals, was neither simple nor direct. Race must be

¹ Drew Faust et al., “Interchange: The Practice of History,” *The Journal of American History*, 90 (Sep. 2003), 585.

² Beth Barton Schweiger. *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 176

grappled with, but neither in isolation nor bounded by issues of racism alone. Texas clerics situated their racism in vast and complicated cultural visions. Their quest for moral reform hints at broad, dynamic, and fundamental concerns more expansive than race alone. It hints at conceptions of righteousness, religious identity, and social and racial divisions.

As the problem of race and religion begs for broader consideration, the clerical insurgency in Texas suggests one possible path: historians might profitably think about morality and righteousness as they do race or gender or class. They can consider religion as a “fourth lens,” as a socially constructed identity, or culture, that grounds people in their daily lives, provides meaning in the world, and offers a mutable mindset that ties some individuals together and rips other individuals apart. The Bible Belt was “made” by building churches and expanding denominations, but it was also made because an infectious culture spread across the South and marked and bounded the population according to notions of righteousness.

An acute moral identity underpinned the work of moral reform. Closely held notions of righteousness situated reformers on the right side of a cut-and-dry division between saints and sinners. And although the distinction was drawn by the churches, politics quickly became the medium for maintaining and reinforcing such distinctions. Political decision-making, as much as church membership, became the marker of morality. Voting trumped praying for realizing their own righteousness. Texans acquired a moral identity through their denominations, but they practiced it through politics. There

they drew their moral identity against the debauched and sinful other. In this way, morality became the engine of the Bible Belt.

But what of race? By understanding the paternalistic racial attitudes of white religious leaders, analyzing the rhetoric of religious reformers, and investigating the attitudes of the black religious world, a complicated language of race and morality emerges, one marked by “best” and “worst” conceptions of society, and one that contributed both to the tragic descent into disfranchisement and to the construction of the Bible Belt. Understanding southerners’ broad and keenly felt notions of morality, and how religion and politics played into them, may expose the relationship between race and religion and the roots of the American Bible Belt. What if southern clerics innovated a politics of morality that could both incorporate and transcend a narrow racism? What if they could furnish not only a language but a mode of thinking powerful enough to accommodate and transcend a basic southern racism? It would be a system of thought that could be exportable. It could follow white southerners in their national diaspora. It could root itself in Southern California or the Midwest, and it could thrive as well in all parts of the Jim Crow South. It could thrive during Jim Crow, and it could survive Jim Crow. It could emerge after the dismantling of segregation and retain all the power of Jim Crow passions with none of the unfashionable Jim Crow baggage. Morality could be this conception. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, southern clerics fashioned an appealing, easy-to-learn, easily translatable language. Tied to religion and politics, and to notions of history and government, morality divided the population no less than Jim Crow zeal. And yet morality worked better at maintaining dynamic boundaries. Righteousness could do the work of race, but move beyond it, too. It would

be a broad social division built upon religion but capacious enough to incorporate—and at times, ignore—traditional prejudice. It would function much the same, but it would be more deeply rooted, more intractable, and more intoxicating to the vast population of the United States.

The Bible Belt was born in the early twentieth century and soon thereafter southern apostles spread their creed across the country. Fundamentalist religion and moral politics washed over the nation during the 1920s.³ In the West and Midwest, for instance, the religion fostered in the land of Jim Crow thrived without Jim Crow. How? The answer lies in something just as powerful, just as formidable, and just as appealing. It rests in something as equally motivating and foundational as any notion of white supremacy. The champions of the Bible Belt submerged themselves into something beyond race, class, and gender. They charted a new righteous community with markers and boundaries that could be manned and defended and that would allow them to sally forth against dens of vice and iniquity and train their eyes on purity and power and politics. This was the Bible Belt that spread across the country. This was the movement that pulled religion out of the pulpits and pews and thrust it into the world. Although at times constrained by racism, it did not rely upon it. It depended upon something broader, perhaps softer, and certainly less offensive to national sensibilities: a notion of morality.

The rise of political religion did not occur in a racial vacuum. Racism was there, of course. It was always there. But scholars too often stop when they encounter evidence of reformers' racism. They too quickly ascribe it precedence. They too easily regard it as

³ See especially James Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: Norton, 2011), 225-230.

a skeleton key, as the simple foundation for a dynamic movement that appealed to many southerners and to many Americans. Confronted with some reformers' racist rhetoric, it is hard to resist. Ted Ownby, for instance, highlights the black-as-rapist fear-mongering among Deep South prohibitionists. "Stop the sale of intoxicants in Georgia," one Georgia Methodist minister wrote in 1899, "and every white woman will breathe more freely."⁴ Many historians root the movement there. One recent historian of southern prohibition called the reformers' deployment of racial prejudice "essential to the movement's ultimate success in the region."⁵ And Texas does indeed offer instances that might affirm such judgments.

Geographic bonds, family ties, Confederate mythology, the cotton economy, and self-identity all marked Texas as a full-fledged member of the South. But what about race? Observers since regional political scientist V.O. Key have noted that some Lone Star racial dynamics hinted at divergence.⁶ The proportion of black Texans decreased steadily throughout the postbellum decades. Whereas antebellum Texas displayed an unremarkable demographic profile, black populations in Texas after the war diminished to numbers unseen among the former Confederate states. By 1910 African Americans accounted for only 17.7 percent of the Texas population. This was the smallest percentage among the former Confederate states. In 1910 only 8 of 217 Texas counties

⁴ Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 172.

⁵ "Also key to this victory was the identification of the antiliquor cause with other social issues, especially race. Between 1880 and 1910, evangelicals successfully tied prohibition to these larger concerns with southern society, a development that proved essential to the movement's ultimate success in the region." Joe L. Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause: Southern White Evangelicals and the Prohibition Movement* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 2-3.

⁶ V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1949), 254-60, 646-675.

had black majorities.⁷ In some parts of West Texas—places such as Lubbock, Amarillo, and Abilene, where, incidentally, the Bible Belt would thrive—black populations were almost nonexistent. In politics, the state produced relatively few virulent race-baiters. Texas had no James Vardaman, Theodore Bilbo, or Rebecca Latimer Felton. And yet, the frequency and ferocity of racial violence aligned Texas with other southern states. Texas evinced all of the barbaric worst of southern racism. In a particularly notorious 1893 episode in Paris [Texas], more than 15,000 witnessed Henry Smith tortured and heard his screams and watched him burned alive on a scaffold bearing the word “justice.” Souvenir seekers combed the ashes afterward for keepsakes. Texas would produce many such mementos: it trailed only Mississippi and Georgia in the number of lynchings.⁸ Texas was both a southern state and a racist state.

White religious leaders in Texas naturally trafficked in the age’s racial prejudice. They lived in the most racist region of a mostly racist country. They were racists. Notions of white supremacy grounded their racial views, and prohibitionists painted blacks and other minorities with the region’s reigning racism. In 1906 the Baptist General Convention of Texas’s Committee on Negro Population said blacks had “brute force and numbers” and “high animal propensities” (incidentally, “the Saxon [had] all the qualities that make kings”).⁹ Most agreed that enfranchised blacks had corrupted Reconstruction-era politics. None would ever have endorsed racial amalgamation, and most endorsed

⁷ J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), 197.

⁸ Walter L. Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 3, 19-20.

⁹ Quoted in John Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity, 1900-1980* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 94.

some system of segregation supported by legislation.¹⁰ The Baptist editor and prohibitionist leader J.B. Cranfill best embodied the racist element of the Texas prohibitionists. “The negro is a negro,” he wrote in 1888, “and is below the white men in every essential regard.”¹¹

Cranfill criticized his northern prohibition allies for meddling with southern race relations. “The color line is here,” he said, “and [it] will stay as long as there is a race caste.”¹² But he also had to defend himself against rivals’ race-baiting. Critics charged prohibitionists for advocating equality. Prohibitionists charged their critics for the same. In 1886, for instance, Cranfill blasted a northern paper, *The Voice*, for being “sadly at sea” on the “color line down here.” Illustrating that all sides race-baited the issue, Cranfill slammed the paper for suggesting prohibition would “‘break down the color line’ and bring the races to an absolute equality.” He assured his readers that prohibition would never do so. The southern social order was safe. “You don’t know us,” he said, “the ‘color line’ may be broken down in the sweet fields of Eden, but it will never be broken down while the races live, any more than the sexual line will be destroyed.”¹³ Besides cautioning historians to mute their praise for the reformers’ gender politics, Cranfill’s assurances demonstrate that prohibition stood astride the region’s racial dynamics. Prohibitionists were race-baited, and they race-baited. When confronted with racial rhetoric, Cranfill fired back. “There is but one place in the South where the ‘color line’ is at all disturbed,” he said, “and that is in the rumshops. There all drink and are ruined at

¹⁰ In his profile of Texas Baptists, John Storey writes “Although Texas Baptists rarely commented on specific Jim Crow laws, they clearly approved the pattern of segregation buttressed by such legislation.” Storey, 93.

¹¹ Joshua Hicks Scrapbook, Texas Labor Archives, University of Texas at Arlington, quoted in Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), xxiii.

¹² Hicks Scrapbook, quoted in Davidson, *Race and Class*, xxiii.

¹³ J. B. Cranfill, “Prohibition Orators in the South,” Clipping, January 14, 1886, Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection, Archives, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

the same bar. But there is no hope that the 'color line' will ever be broken down otherwise"¹⁴

Cranfill clearly demonstrates the extent of prohibitionists' commitment to white supremacy, but his statements generally marked the rhetorical limits of Texas's white religious leadership. The rhetoric and the actions of leading white ministers and other denominational leaders generally reflected a racism of a relatively lazy sort. They were neither extreme nor innovative, neither at the forefront of regional "race-making" nor particularly vocal in racial matters.¹⁵

On the whole, white religious leaders in Texas resisted the worst of southern racism. They rejected virulence: few prominent religious leaders indicted the black race as savage or dangerous. Prominent religious leaders typically spurned hard-edged racial hatreds and resisted stoking racial fears. Most aligned themselves with a strain of racism most typically described by scholars as paternalistic. They held the remnants of a pro-slavery Christianity. They believed blacks to be a childlike race of helpless dependents who needed guidance and leadership, not independence and equality. In 1910 a white Baptist layman from Teague called blacks "a trust committed to us."¹⁶ The Mississippi transplant and clerical leader James Gambrell best embodied this paternalism. He called blacks a "weak, untrained race" that, "to a remarkable degree ... have the child-heart" (although, he noted, "that set them a thousand leagues ahead of a great many university professors").¹⁷ One historian described the racial opinions of Texas Baptists as approaching a paternalism reminiscent of other southern religious leaders: Georgia

¹⁴ Cranfill, "Prohibition Orators in the South," Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection.

¹⁵ For southern race-making, see especially Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

¹⁶ *Baptist Standard*, April 14, 1910, quoted in Storey, *Texas Baptists*, 96.

¹⁷ *Baptist Standard*, June 13, 1907, quoted in Storey, *Texas Baptists*, 97.

Methodist Atticus G. Haygood, Alabama Baptist Jabez Curry, Mississippi Methodist Charles Betts Galloway, and the New South's secular apostle Henry Grady.¹⁸ That assessment generally holds true. Most of the state's white, religious establishment in Texas espoused a relatively moderate position on race and white supremacy. From the end of the Civil War to the maturation of moral reform, white religious leaders in Texas practiced a paternalistic racism. They approached black Texans with this fundamental belief.

In the aftermath of war, emancipation, and the black religious exodus, many white religious leaders fretted. They feared, in the words of Waco Baptists, for freedpeople "suddenly cut loose from that restraint and wholesome discipline which has heretofore been a safeguard and security against the exercise of the worst passions . . . as exhibited in the untutored and uncultivated mind."¹⁹ Whites had already lost legal authority over the black population; now they were losing spiritual influence. Methodist Homer Thrall reflected on the black exodus in 1872. He wanted "to show why we lost the control of our colored people after the war." Although, like so many of his peers, he blamed the meddling of northern missionaries and politicians, he also acknowledged the role of white racism and the demands of blacks themselves.²⁰ He regarded the black spiritual exodus with ambivalence. Lamenting that his Methodists "lost control of the colored race," he turned his hopes to a whites-only "providential mission." He believed "we may have a special mission to the white people of the country." He said the Texas constitution forbade any and all interference in the inner lives of religious bodies and so concluded

¹⁸ Storey, *Texas Baptists*, 93.

¹⁹ Waco Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1865, 4-5, quoted in Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 37.

²⁰ Homer Thrall, *History of Methodism in Texas* (Houston: E. H. Cushing, Publisher, 1872), 141.

that “Colored people may be forced promiscuously with whites into railway-cars, steamboats, hotels, theatres, etc., but unbidden they cannot force themselves into churches.” For Thrall, Methodism would be a refuge of segregated whiteness.²¹ But such rhetoric hardly captured the tone of the state’s popular religious opinion.

White Baptist preacher F. M. Law argued that whites should continue to care for the spiritual condition of blacks. He served as a trustee of Bryan’s African Baptist Church. He preferred white leadership over interracial cooperation; black religious life, he said, should be “taken hold of, conducted and controlled by Southern people.”²² But Law’s disregard for black self-determination still hinted at concerns for African Americans’ spiritual wellbeing. When a new, blacks-only Methodist conference formed in East Texas in 1870, even the segregationist Homer Thrall praised the organization for “seeking to enlighten and elevate the colored race.”²³ Although he embraced his new whites-only church, Thrall praised the new black churches, too.

Acknowledging the determination of black congregants, many white religious leaders acceded control and accepted a subordinate role. They resigned themselves to assisting blacks in pursuit of their own spiritual independence. Baptist leader B. H. Carroll preached to black congregations and helped build black churches. Years later, one freedman praised Carroll’s work in raising one particular black church. The freedman recalled, in dialect recorded by a WPA interviewer, that Carroll gave the building “to us old slaves for our color, an’ to dis day hit stands as a monument to de work of dese good

²¹ Thrall, *History of Methodism*, 142

²² *Texas Baptist Herald*, October 3, 1866, quoted in J. M. Carroll, *A History of Texas Baptists: Comprising a Detailed Account of their Activities, their Progress, and their Achievements* (Dallas: Baptist Standard Publishing Company, 1923), 356

²³ Thrall, *History of Methodism*, 141.

folks of de Brazos bottom.” Some whites resisted interracial endeavors, but most insisted that whites had a responsibility to nurture and oversee black religious development.²⁴

Throughout Reconstruction, white religious leaders demonstrated concern and, at times, an abiding respect for the spiritual life of black Texans. In 1872 the *Texas Baptist and Herald* intimated its concern for black souls. “The negro,” it read, “is an object of heavenly pity, redeeming love and atoning blood.” Whatever their earthly relations, the races shared an eternal destiny. “The negro will be represented in the great congregation of the blood-washed at God’s right hand,” read the *Herald*. “Like the rest, he will wear a spotless robe of purity. Like the rest, will strike a tuneful harp of praise. Like the rest, will bear the palm of final victory and triumph: and like the rest will receive a crown of fadeless glory. He is a legitimate object of our prayers, charity, and instruction.” Evangelists had to fulfill their duty to blacks as well as whites: “millennial glory will not be complete without the redemption of Ethiopia.” The *Herald* urged the righteous to visit black populations, and, with humility, offer them whatever instruction or literature would profit their eternal souls.²⁵

White religious leaders maintained their concern for black spiritual life after Reconstruction fell. White churches worked for the remainder of the century. At the inaugural meeting of the General Missionary Baptist Convention in 1894, an African American preacher, C. H. Griggs of Cuero, declared for interracial cooperation (provided whites respected basic black rights). “The colored Baptists of Texas, and of the South,” he said, “are poor; their heads are not towering very high above the poverty level.”

²⁴ *Texas Narratives*, supp. series 2, vol. 2, pt. 1, 450 (Sylvester Brooks); *Texas Narratives*, supp. series 2, pt. 2, vol. 3, 769 (Harrison Cole); *Texas Narratives*, supp. series 2, pt. 9, vol. 10, 4055-46 (Alice Wilkins); and see *Texas Narratives*, supp. series 2, vol. 3, pt. 2, 703 (Henry Childers), quoted in Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 50-51. Harvey, 37, 52

²⁵ *Texas Baptist Herald*, August 14, 1872.

Whites answered. They defended black evangelization and attacked the advocates of a whites-only Christianity. In 1893 the *Baptist Observer* ran an item critical of black evangelization. It was signed by a Baptist from Paris, Texas. “Put what Christian garb on the negro you may,” it read, “he will be nothing, more or less, than a robed negro.” “God,” it continued, “has not prepared the soil as yet for their reception and growth as is evidenced by the daily life of this people.”²⁶ The *Standard* laid into the item. “There is a breadth of skepticism and prejudice in this article that, to a believer in God’s fully inspired word, is appalling,” it read.²⁷ “The Standard submits that the Paris brother neither represents correctly the negroes of the South nor the feeling entertained towards them by white Baptists of the South. They are struggling against fearful odds. They have the deep prejudices of the narrow-minded, the effect of centuries of slavery, and, worst of all, their own ignorance and passions to contend with. It is our duty to help and not to hinder them. If God has made of one blood all the races of men—and the Bible so teaches—the negroes are as much the subjects of gospel address as we are, and it is as much our duty to evangelize them as to send the gospel to our own people.”²⁸ The *Standard* was not afraid to repudiate the worst of southern racism. It admonished opposing opinions. An Alabama Baptist, C.J. Bentley, wrote to the *Standard* in support. Bentley slammed the *Observer*’s arguments against black evangelization and black education. “But says one ‘educate the negro and he is a rascal,’” he began. “So is a white man, void of moral culture and religion.” “Perchance,” he wrote, “some one who holds exalted opinions of this bloated anglo-saxon braggadocio atmosphere we Southern negro-haters have will say I am crazy over this subject. So did the opposers of the Apostle Paul

²⁶ Quoted in *Baptist Standard*, June 15, 1893.

²⁷ *Baptist Standard*, June 15, 1893.

²⁸ *Baptist Standard*, June 15, 1893.

say, when he preached the gospel to the Gentile ‘dog.’ The same,” he concluded, “was said of Christ.”²⁹

White religious leaders not only urged their brethren to aid in developing African American spiritual life, they praised black religion. The same year that the *Standard* attacked the critics of black evangelization and urged white missionary work, it expressed steadfast respect for black religious commitment. “As to his [“the negro”] religious convictions,” the *Standard* read, “they are deep and abiding. We say it reverently, but we have more confidence in the Christianity of the pious negro, who sings his simple melodies in his humble home, than we have in the Christianity of the upper ten circles among our own people. He is, when uncorrupted by the defects of the saloon and other agencies of the devil, run by white men and licensed by political parties that are dominated by white men, more easily influenced by the gospel of Jesus than his brother in white.” It continued. “And if this brother and other white Baptists would, in proportion to their means, contribute as liberally to gospel work as the negroes do, the question of the world’s evangelization would be settled.”³⁰ Moreover, the *Standard* registered some understanding of black obstacles and recognized some measure of black progress. The Baptist paper lauded African American development. “He [“the negro”] has made as great progress during the twenty-eight years of his freedom as any people with like enslavement and similar subsequent environments ever made.”³¹

A few prominent religious leaders, including Joseph M. Dawson and Benjamin Franklin Riley, committed themselves to working with African Americans. Although undoubtedly retrograde by modern sensibilities, they stood at the vanguard of white racial

²⁹ *Baptist Standard*, July 13, 1893.

³⁰ *Baptist Standard*, June 15, 1893.

³¹ *Baptist Standard*, June 15, 1893.

thought in the turn-of-the-twentieth-century South. Some promoted limited black political rights. In 1921 the Baptist cleric J. B. Gambrell, a paternalist, native Mississippian, son of slaveholders, former Confederate officer, and critic of postbellum black enfranchisement, ceded that intelligent blacks should be allowed to vote and hold office.³² Others took larger steps. Some resisted segregation and worked actively with black religious leaders.

Benjamin Franklin Riley, the Alabama-born pastor of Houston's First Baptist Church, a denominational historian, and an ardent prohibitionist (he resigned his pulpit in 1907 to head the state's chapter of the Anti Saloon League), published *The White Man's Burden* in 1910. He wrote "with special reference to the responsibility of the white race to the Negro problem." While burdened with all the paternalistic racism of his upbringing, he nevertheless prescribed a role for blacks in the making of American history, urged blacks to take pride in their race, and, pointing to successful individuals, rejected notions of racial inferiority. He instead favored a belief revolving around the environmental disadvantages of black southerners. He denounced southern racists for their ignorance and blasted the quiet critics of racism for their silence.³³

Riley befriended Booker T. Washington and spoke at his famed Tuskegee Institute. Support for Washington became something of a marker for the clerics' racial paternalism. Even J. B. Cranfill, on the virulent end of the state's racial-religious spectrum, had been in awe of Washington's oratory and compared him favorably to William Jennings Bryan and Texans B.H. Carroll and George W. Truett.³⁴ Washington's program of uplift aligned with one white minister who, in 1886, urged black Texans to

³² Storey, 99.

³³ Benjamin Franklin Riley, *The White Man's Burden : A Discussion of the Interracial Question with Special Reference to the Responsibility of the White Race to the Negro Problem* (Birmingham, Ala.: B. F. Riley, 1910).

³⁴ Storey, 100.

learn from “past mistakes and blunders” by shying away from politics and embrace “the acquisition of education and property,” as “elements of power and respectability.”³⁵

When Washington died in 1915, the Baptist General Convention of Texas resolved that he should be remembered as an example for both races.

White religious leaders were not afraid to praise their black brethren. When George Truett traveled to Boston to address the multiracial Baptist World Alliance in 1911, he praised the work of black evangelists abroad. He commended the “More than two million Baptists in black who keep one spirit and one aim and one consecration and one purpose as they go, the flying evangels of Christ to make known the gospel to the world. You brethren from afar, from the many countries throughout the whole world beyond this, when you go back, tell them that the white Baptists of America count as one of their chiefest and most glorious assets in winning America and the world to Christ, our great army of brothers in black who are side by side with us.”³⁶

Riley went beyond encouraging rhetoric. He demonstrated a profound willingness to organize and work with southern blacks. He assisted in the foundation of the Southern Negro Anti-Saloon Federation. It was headquartered in Dallas before it moved to Birmingham. Although the Federation was largely led and funded by whites (Riley served as its initial superintendent), Riley nevertheless demonstrated a willingness to work with such prominent black leaders as Washington and the scholar and activist Kelly Miller.³⁷ Working together with black prohibitionists, Riley rejected racial arguments for

³⁵ Missionary Baptist Convention of Texas, *Minutes*, 1886, 46-50, quoted in Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 229.

³⁶ George W. Truett, “The Coming of the Kingdom in America,” in The Baptist World Alliance, *Second Congress, Philadelphia, June 19-25, 1911: Record of Proceedings* (Philadelphia, Pa., Harper & Brother Company, for the Philadelphia Committee, 1911), 425.

³⁷ *Baptist Standard*, May 6, 1909.

prohibition. He absented rhetoric of rape and violence from his writings. Many others followed his lead. Although historian Paul Harvey argues that “Riley's refusal to fan the fires of racism in this way was rare even among the southern religious progressives,” the experience of Texas prohibitionists suggests otherwise. Even those who rejected Riley’s remarkable openness resisted a crass race-baiting.³⁸

In his many editorials in *The Baptist Standard*, J. B. Cranfill assured an anxious audience that “the Negro” was not to be feared. Deploying typical paternalist fare, he said “He [the Negro] will never have social equality and does not want it.”³⁹ The cruelest feature of Cranfill’s thought may have been its willful ignorance of black aspirations, its refusal to acknowledge black demands for full freedom in that age of injustice. But in a period of lynching and mob violence, the reformers’ paternalism nevertheless proposed a more positive and cooperative option than a violent racial apartheid.

Perhaps the best indicator of white religious leaders’ racial views were their attitudes toward lynching. Most white Texas religious leaders never abandoned African Americans to hate and violence. They generally refused to denigrate blacks as beasts and brutes, and they repudiated racial violence. In 1902 the BGCT denounced Charles Carroll’s popular *The Negro a Beast* and urged all Baptists to repudiate its depiction of blacks as subhuman. In 1903 James Cranfill condemned Thomas Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots* as inflammatory.⁴⁰ Although assuredly believers in white supremacy, white religious leaders spurned the kinds of incendiary rhetoric that riled so many to violence elsewhere in the South.

³⁸ Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 218.

³⁹ Cranfill, “Prohibition Orators in the South,” Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection.

⁴⁰ *Baptist Standard*, February 5, 1903, quoted in Storey, 96.

Outside of the churches, Texas matched the region's barbarities and rivaled its neighbors in savagery. Lynchings occurred across the state. Henry Smith's lynching in Paris, Texas, aroused national attention. So did others. In 1916, the white citizens of Waco murdered seventeen-year-old Jesse Washington. The mayor and chief of police joined thousands on the lawn of the city hall and cheered as Washington was beaten, burned, and mutilated.⁴¹ First Baptist Church pastor Joseph M. Dawson watched in horror and condemned the mob of "five thousand monsters." He introduced a resolution in the Waco Pastor's Association denouncing the crime. Austin Avenue Methodist Church minister Frank P. Culver, First Presbyterian Church minister Charles T. Caldwell, and Columbus Street Baptist Church pastor Frank S. Groner all signed.⁴² They and other religious leaders detested lynching.

After an outbreak of mob violence in Georgia resulted in a lynching, J.B. Gambrell wrote that "the men in Georgia who burned that hapless negro at the stake, burned the constitution and all the laws of Georgia, burned down the whole superstructure of civilization, and stripped every human life, under the influence of the maddening spirit, of all protection."⁴³ "The fact is," the *Baptist Standard* had written several years earlier, "that mob violence excites crime, because it is in itself crime, and no seeds of this kind were ever sown that did not bear a harvest."⁴⁴ The pastor of the Central Baptist Church [in Dallas?], Rev. A. J. Kincaid[sp?], blasted mob violence.

⁴¹ See Patricia Bernstein, *The First Waco Horror: The Lynching of Jesse Washington and the Rise of the NAACP* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2005).

⁴² Storey, 108.

⁴³ *Baptist Standard*, May 11, 1899.

⁴⁴ *Baptist Standard*, November 23, 1893.

“Every one of these lawless lynchings was a murder and may be added to the total of the other murders,” he said. “Is not this a startling state of things?”⁴⁵

Texas Baptist leaders consistently and unequivocally repudiated lynching.

“Throughout all the years of our manhood,” the *Baptist Standard* wrote, “we have fought unflinchingly and persistently every form of mobs and mob violence. We believe that any man and every man who participates in any kind of a mob or lynching becomes a murderer. The nature of the crime committed has no bearing whatever on the case.”

Baptists not only opposed the misdeed, they urged others to speak out against it. “It is high time that our preachers were thundering out in no uncertain tones against every species of mobocracy, and certainly our press has a great work before it in inspiring in the public mind a reverence for our laws.”⁴⁶

White religious leaders in Texas renounced racial violence. They charged lynching to the same prevailing irreligion that led them into public life in the first place. Christianity and racial violence, they said, were incompatible. “If we wantonly destroy the negro, we destroy our own souls,” wrote Baptist preacher William T. Tardy.⁴⁷ J.B. Gambrell believed evangelical religion could soften racial tensions and ameliorate racial strife. He believed that, united in God, the races could prosper peacefully together. Gambrell rooted mob violence and race-hate in the absence of “civilization.” Only civic education could ameliorate racial tension. But, Gambrell asked rhetorically, “How is this education to be promoted? Very largely by the ministry,” he said. “Party politics have no place in the pulpits, but the sanctity, the dignity and the heaven-appointed function of civil government are abundantly sustained by the Word of God, and every preacher in

⁴⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, December 19, 1893.

⁴⁶ *Baptist Standard*, November 23, 1893.

⁴⁷ William T Tardy, *The Man and the Message* (Marshall, Tex.: Mrs. W. T. Tardy, 1920), 186.

this land ought to fulminate against mobs and against the spirit that panders to the low and vicious in politics, until there is a change of atmosphere.”⁴⁸

Texas religious leaders renounced the wanton passions and violence that nourished lynching. Not all historians have agreed. After studying several counties in northeastern Texas, historian Walter Buenger concluded that “lynching and reform wrapped together.” He noted that Henry Smith’s lynching in Paris, Texas, coincided with heightened prohibition agitation. “At the same time as Smith’s death, demands for sobriety, order, and good government peppered political debate in all parts of Northeast Texas,” he wrote.⁴⁹ But causation is not correlation. In many ways, moral rhetoric did not contribute to lynching as much as lynching contributed to moral reform. The reformers blamed liquor for inciting white violence just as they blamed it for inciting black misdeeds. Vigilantism hardly conformed with the reformers’ aura of respectability, and neither did race-baiting.

Several authors have explored the success of southern religion in its pursuit of moral reform and discovered rabid race-baiting. Some have attributed the success of the clerical movement to the very deployment of such racist rhetoric. In areas of the South where the most virulent strains of racism ruled, such was perhaps the case. But in Texas reformers resisted the urge to seriously indulge such tactics. Lone Star reformers sometimes deployed racism in their own way, but no less intensely than their opponents. Religious activists were just as often on the receiving end of racial attacks. “The preacher of applied Christianity here has been the object of withering contempt,” reflected Baptist

⁴⁸ *Baptist Standard*, May 11, 1899.

⁴⁹ Buenger, *The Path to a New South*, 25. Buenger also claims, “Tellingly, neither the southern white Baptist nor Methodist organizations took a strong stand against lynching until after 1930.” Buenger, *The Path to a New South*, 26.

preacher William T. Tardy. “‘Negro lover’ has been the epithet flipped from the tongue of the low-born and the vicious.”⁵⁰

At times white prohibitionists evoked surprisingly sympathetic or enlightened racial attitudes. In fact, viewed in the larger context of southern race relations, racism appears as an independent variable on the path to moral reform, neither central nor necessary to the clerical triumph. Generations ago, C. Vann Woodward noted that black populations hardly aligned with the geographical prevalence of reform. “The remarkable success of the movement in the South was often attributed to the presence of the Negro,” C. Vann Woodward wrote in his seminal *Origins of the New South*, but he agreed with those who said “the saloon has been abolished and retained in the communities of the South without apparent reference to the presence of the negro.” The only correlation to prohibition, he said, was “a high percentage of native-born, rural, Protestant elements in the population.”⁵¹ Prohibition and the triumph of the clerical movement depended upon an activist brand of evangelical faith, not the peculiar racial views of its articulators. If reformers had to contend with race relations, as they did in the Deep South, they would. Southern clerics sometimes aligned their movement with racist fears, and sometimes they offered kinder alternatives. But in the long run it didn’t matter. The movement thrived with rigid racism and it thrived without it. Generations later, C. Vann Woodward’s conclusion seems to hold: prohibition’s fate flowed with, but usually independent from, southern racism.

Again, prohibitionists did of course deploy regional fare. While it denounced lynching, for instance, the *Baptist Standard* also editorialized that “saloons brutalize and

⁵⁰ Tardy, *The Man and the Message*, 184.

⁵¹ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 390.

profligate blacks and white women suffer from their outrages.”⁵² But seen in another way, such ugly rhetoric hinted further at their paternal racism and not at an unadulterated race hatred. Like children, white prohibitionists said, blacks must be spared from bad influences lest they become corrupt and criminal. Whites didn’t advocate prohibition because blacks were beasts, whites advocated it because, in their minds, liquor *made* them beasts. Reformers applied the same argument, freed from the region’s black-male-as-rapist trope, across all races and ethnicities. Prohibition saved everyone. In the moral universe of the prohibitionists, saloons fostered juvenile delinquency, domestic abuse, and broken homes. It bankrupted farmers and trapped workers in poverty. It made men insane. All men. Prohibitionists believed prohibition would antique asylums, empty jails, and liberate men’s weak constitutions from liquor’s blighting menace. In the South, these arguments often took on racialized meaning, but such meanings were never essential. In fact, rigid racism became increasingly inconsequential. In Texas, a broad moral identity, and not a narrowly racial one, increasingly tied reformers together.

Clerical activists carried the marker of morality forward in Texas. They approached race with both inherited prejudices and innovated conceptions of righteousness. Whether or not they imagined blacks as debauched brutes, they still regarded many African Americans as potential allies, as redeemable souls capable of morality and respectability and worthy of a home within their righteous community. They assumed educated African Americans could speak well, live justly, and join their growing reform movement. White reformers could reject, or set aside, an overpowering, mystical, black-white racial division. They could side with black allies over white opponents. This was the power, however limited, of the reformers’ moral universe. Often racism and

⁵² *Baptist Standard*, January 5, 1911, quoted in Storey, 23-24.

morality coexisted peacefully, but racism was not the root of reform. Broader dynamics moved southerners to construct the Bible Belt.

Reformers and their opponents both turned to racial arguments. They lived in a racist society and held racist notions. It was inevitable. But the emerging prohibition movement constructed something else, something bigger. It was more than “whiteness,” that vague yet still wonderfully insightful scholarly vogue. No, the moral reformers built something bigger. Whatever it was, race amalgamated with citizenship and respectability and all the cultural weight of white southern Protestantism. Studies of whiteness reveal the power of racial division for “white” Americans. Whiteness studies helpfully remind us that race cuts in more than one direction, but whiteness also limits historians’ field of vision. The clerics offered an identity more appealing and more capacious than whiteness. They offered morality, bestowed godliness, and sold a world of righteousness that could be had for little cost. Morality became their social marker, not race—or, at least, not race alone. Whether channeled through racism or not, morality worked public antagonisms into group identities and glued together a vast and a committed subculture of religious activism. Its steady spread testified to its appeal and heralded the arrival of the Bible Belt. It was this spreading notion of righteousness that made the Bible Belt.

Morality marked the language of the reformers. Contemporary historian Francis W. Johnson called the prohibitionists’ 1887 campaign a “great moral crusade.”⁵³ Senator Morris Sheppard, progressive champion of prohibition and Christian nationalism, evoked morality as the great cure for the spiritual crisis. As a Methodist youth leader, he believed the age’s ensnared youth could be spared only if church leaders “implant in his [the

⁵³ Francis White Johnson, *A History of Texas and Texans*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1914), 1389

youth's] soul a purity of purpose and a morality of principal that enables him to stand out against the corruption of his time like a great white column against the blackness of an approaching storm." Sheppard's career outlined how reformers escaped the spiritual crisis and implanted the seeds of purpose in Protestant America. Sheppard found the solution in prohibition. As a United States Congressman and later a United States senator, Sheppard devoted himself to the antiliquor crusade. It became his "great white column," his marker of morality in a dark and sinful world. Of course the language of whiteness against darkness would certainly evoke a specific image among southern audiences, but his suggestion for resisting the tide of iniquity rested not on race, or at least not strictly and solely on race. As the tactics and rhetoric of reformers reveal, it rested instead on religious identity, on politics, and on the marriage of the two.⁵⁴

The increasing salience of a moral identity led reformers to divide society into two groups, one "better," and one "worse." This became their vocabulary. This new vision of society defined their movement. More important for any investigation of race and religion, it superseded a simple white-and-black worldview.

Many studies of race and reform in the South suggest the prevalence of a better-and-worse-sort worldview. In North Carolina, historian Glenda Gilmore discovered that gendered identity allowed for limited interracial alliances, and, incidentally, noticed that black and white elites each cultivated a "best" or "better class" identity that they cast against the lesser mass of their race.⁵⁵ The discovery is not hers alone. Others have discovered the same phenomenon when they studied incidents of whiteness. One

⁵⁴ Morris Sheppard, "His Eloquent Words on the Influences of The Epworth League," Speech Delivered in San Antonio, 1896, Morris Sheppard Papers, 1894-1953, Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁵⁵ Glenda Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

historian of Alabama reformers and mill workers found whiteness reserved for the better class of child labor reformers, not the debauched and degenerate workers themselves.⁵⁶ In the Central Texas cotton country, Neil Foley's study of Hispanic and white sharecroppers found that whiteness aligned closely with economic power and self-sufficiency—both groups hungered for the economic power that conferred respectability and “whiteness.”⁵⁷ All suggest the power of a belief in a “better sort,” a sort of contrived social superiority that amalgamated race, class, gender, politics, and religion. To call it whiteness misses too many of its essential ingredients. Race was a part of it—but only a part. Texas clerics were not virulent race-baiters. They fought such passions. In other states, in Deep South states, this was often not the case. But the variety testifies to a greater truth—racism fails to measure as a dependent variable in the emergence of politicized religion. The ability of the Bible Belt to spread beyond the South testifies, instead, that the politics of morality could transcend the South's rigid racism. When Texans such as Robert Shuler and J. Frank Norris took the “Texas theology” to the West and Midwest, their moral politics found equally fertile ground. The clerics innovated something more alluring than a simple rehashing of southern racial divisions. They invented the marker of morality.

White religious leaders consistently imagined a social divide that transcended the rigidities of the American color line. Among all populations, they said, there was a “better sort” and a “worse sort.” It became the central explanation for why some supported their causes and why some opposed them. An aging Methodist, William S. Herndon, lectured across the state in favor of statewide prohibition in 1887. Herndon

⁵⁶ Shelley Sallee's *The Whiteness of Child Labor Reform in the New South* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1997).

was, according to his contemporary Francis W. Johnson, “on the moral side of all social questions” and “was the central figure upon the stump in favor of the banishment of the saloon.” But it was Johnson’s descriptions of Herndon’s supporters that most closely aligned with the reformers’ social imagination. Johnson said “Texas’s best citizens gathered to hear him tell of the evil of intemperance.”⁵⁸ Among blacks and whites both, such reformers said, there were those who traded in irreligion, vice, and immorality. These fallen citizens rejected God and religion and forfeited membership in the clerics’ moral community. But there was another group, the better element, that welcomed religion, embraced the moral mission of the reformers, and engaged with righteousness. Such a divide, reformers said, split across all the imagined American races. Just like whites, African Americans had their own “better” and “worse” elements.

Benjamin Franklin Riley, the Baptist minister, prominent prohibitionist, and interracial worker, declared “there are two very distinct classes of Negroes, the good and the bad.” He praised “the better element” and denounced the other. The actions of “the criminal negro” overshadowed the work of upstanding black southerners, he said. “This,” he explained, “led to a grave disadvantage to the race, for when a crime was committed it was attributed to the Negro race, not to the criminal alone who committed it.” He called it an unfair judgment “in the face of the fact that so many are struggling to raise their race to higher planes.”⁵⁹

Clerics sought to rescue this better sort of blacks. “The disposition to recount only the misdeeds of the unworthy Negroes,” Riley wrote, “has built up a partition between the two races.” According to such an understanding, regional salvation lay not in a

⁵⁸ Johnson, *A History of Texas*, 1389.

⁵⁹ *Baptist Standard*, May 6, 1909.

whites-only movement but in a best-only one. “Nothing short of a general popular movement which would bring into exercise the best of both races, will relieve the situation in the South,” Riley concluded. Despite the region’s venomous racism, he proclaimed “He [“The Negro”] is not without thousands of friends among the better people of the South.” Yet, he conceded, “the sentiment is dissipated and unorganized. The time must come sooner or later when the matter must claim the attention of the best people of the country.”⁶⁰

Riley demonstrated a remarkable commitment to parts of the African American community, but even more rigid white supremacists embraced the idea of a morally hierarchical black population. J. B. Gambrell, for instance, affirmed the existence of “two races, widely different in every respect.” He said “They are, indeed, at the extremes—one the foremost race in the world, the other the rearmost race in the world.”⁶¹ But, amid his racial boundaries, he ceded the existence of a better sort of black citizen. “That a respectable minority of them have attained to an intelligent conception of the situation, and are worthy and good citizens, I cheerfully bear witness,” he wrote. Gambrell joined with other leaders in denouncing lynch law as a barbaric and ineffective solution to the “Negro problem.” He proposed uplift instead: “The great remedy is instruction, broad and general in the methods and the spirit of civilization.”

Clerical leaders incorporated black uplift into their program. It integrated well. In 1889, for instance, Rufus C. Burleson told the BGCT that Baptists should “save our colored brethren from the triple monsters of ignorance, whisky and Catholic delusions.”⁶² Religious education, prohibition, and anti-Catholicism meshed neatly with racial

⁶⁰ Riley, *The White Man’s Burden*, 195-6.

⁶¹ *Baptist Standard*, May 11, 1899.

⁶² Baptist General Convention of Texas, *Proceedings*, 1906, 88-9, quoted in Storey, 94.

paternalism. Burleson and others believed that black Texans were theirs to rescue. They entwined the race issue with moral reform. To clerical activists, their political program would not only acknowledge the role of religion in public life, it would free the black race from misery. Defeat the saloon, they said, and the black population would finally flourish. In 1909 Benjamin Franklin Riley proclaimed that “the basis of the Negro problem, so-called, is the liquor problem.” He conflated the two. “Ignorance, poverty, vagrancy, demoralization debauchery, divorcement, lawlessness, and criminality, so far as these relate to the Negro, are, in the largest measure, due to the saloon,” he said.⁶³ He was not alone. “The white man’s liquor and the white man’s blood make a hellish combination in a black man,” wrote Baptist preacher William T. Tardy.⁶⁴ Many white leaders therefore portrayed prohibition as the central plank in a platform of racial uplift. Contemporary observer Francis W. Johnson praised the prohibition work of William S. Herndon. “The service of the Colonel [Herndon] to the colored race in his advocacy of prohibition,” Johnson wrote, “has proven a great blessing to the race.” Herndon effected prohibition in Tyler, and Johnson concluded that it uplifted local African Americans. “The removal of the saloon from Tyler,” he wrote, “has enabled the Negro to spend money for a home in town, buy a farm and make himself and his family independent and happy.” Progress followed. “His children are properly fed and clothed, his churches and preachers are sustained and other evidences of progress have appeared from time to time.”⁶⁵ Prohibition seemed like magic, and prohibitionists would share it with the least among them.

⁶³ *Baptist Standard*, May 6, 1909.

⁶⁴ Tardy, *The Man and the Message*, 186, quoted in Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 220.

⁶⁵ Johnson, *A History of Texas*, 1389

If liquor debauched the African American community, white religious leaders reasoned, then the best sort of blacks could be enlisted as allies. White prohibitionists therefore embraced the “best sort” of African Americans, those who denounced the saloons, supported the churches, and supported white religious leaders. Benjamin F. Riley claimed “the better class among the colored people were engaged in stoutly opposing strong drink, and in inculcating the principles of sobriety as far as they might.” He lauded “their preachers, teachers, land owners, and thrifty men of business.” He declared them willing “to cooperate with the better element of whites in driving out the saloon.”⁶⁶ But were they?

In the aftermath of Civil War and emancipation, religious African Americans embarked upon the path of spiritual independence. Blacks fled from white churches to form their own congregations in their own churches and under their own pastors. “With or without our concurrence,” wrote the chronicler Homer Thrall, “the colored people were slipping out from under our control.”⁶⁷

The coupling of black self-assertion and white racial beliefs crippled possibilities for a postbellum, biracial, religious establishment. Blacks demanded equality. Whites demanded obedience. Racial fracturing inevitably followed. Newly organized black congregations expected leaders to treat them as equals, to dine with them at their dinner tables and to spend time under their roofs. “If a preacher would not do the same,” Thrall said, “it was difficult for him to get the colored population to hear him preach.” But even if white preachers were so willing, popular white opinion held them back. “If a minister of our church were to do that,” Thrall wrote, “he would lose caste among the white

⁶⁶ *Baptist Standard*, May 6, 1909.

⁶⁷ Thrall, *History of Methodism*, 140.

people. Before the war, a man could preach alternately to white and colored congregations. After emancipation, it was so that a man must confine his ministrations to one class or the other, and our preachers, with great unanimity, chose to minister to their own color. And so,” Thrall concluded, “we lost control of the colored race.”⁶⁸ The era of white rule ended, and with it, biracial worship.⁶⁹

Religious African Americans manufactured their own independent religious world. They drew strength from their organizations. The black churches weathered Reconstruction as the strongest, most stable, and most visible black organizations in the South. Black religious life offered organization and community. Churches steadied black life and buffered individuals against the onslaughts of reactionary politics and racial violence.⁷⁰ Black southerners also enlisted leaders from their pulpits. They looked to their religious leaders for guidance. All across the South, black preachers doubled as political leaders. Ministers made up large numbers of Reconstruction Era black politicians. Many religious leaders viewed their political and religious roles synonymously. Just as their white brethren were learning to do, in the pulpit black leaders often proclaimed the right to “preach politics.”

The black religious world expanded throughout the late-nineteenth century. Like the white denominations, black churches developed and matured. Black Texans swelled their churches and nurtured influential leaders. They had their own renowned evangelists. The “black Billy Sunday,” J. Gordon McPherson, crisscrossed the state proclaiming

⁶⁸ Thrall, *History of Methodism*, 141.

⁶⁹ As biracial religion collapsed, whites could more easily see blacks as objects to be acted upon, not subjects to rule. For the consequences of the collapse of biracial worship, see John B. Boles, *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

⁷⁰ Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 153.

gospel truths. J.L. “Sin Killer” Griffin, the “Rapid-Firing Gun Evangelist” sometimes called the “Sam Jones of the Black Folks,” captivated black audiences with rousing oratory.⁷¹ Such leaders spread the gospel of morality. Like white clerics, they too tied their estimation of the world to the world’s estimation of them. At the turn of the twentieth century, when the moral impulse tugged on all religious leaders, “Sin Killer” Griffin best embodied the black cleric. He flayed the world’s moral lassitude and incorporated the redemption of morality into the redemption of the black race. His revivals revealed this. In the summer of 1903, for instance, Griffin held a weeks-long meeting at Dallas’s Mount Zion Colored Baptist Church. When it ended, thirty-two sinners applied for baptism. Griffin took the meeting to a pool along the Trinity River. The crowd sang of “old time religion” and “washing in the Beautiful Stream.” Griffin, tall and in white robes, delivered one of his cadenced “sin-killing” sermons. “The negro problem will never be solved,” he said, “until you learn to serve God and tend to your own business.” He told the crowd that sin filled the jails with Negroes. Sin kept the race down. But there was a solution. You could be saved, he said. You could receive the “B.A.,” the Born Again, “the first degree of the king’s college.” He immersed several in the river. “Oh come, sinner, come,” he hymned, “no longer in wickedness roam.”⁷²

In addition to fighting sin with sermons, many black preachers were willing to embark upon the great moral crusades. Black political activism did not die with Reconstruction. Nineteenth-century Texas offers examples of black political participation and reveals occurrences of biracial political cooperation. Lawrence Goodwyn’s landmark

⁷¹ William E. Montgomery, “AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCHES,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pkatz>), accessed April 10, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. Griffin’s music and sermons would later be discovered and recorded by American folklorist Alan Lomax.

⁷² *Dallas Morning News*, August 24, 1903; *Colorado Springs Gazette*, September 13, 1903.

recovery of a biracial Populist coalition grew out of his research in Texas politics.⁷³ And just as blacks featured in the Populist moment, they played a role in the prohibition battles of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as well. Edward Ayer's masterful *Promise of the New South* captures the importance of prohibition to the era's racial politics. "Indeed," Ayers wrote, "blacks enjoyed their greatest political activity and visibility of the entire New South era in the prohibition movement." He quotes an 1881 North Carolina newspaper lamenting that "the colored man comes off the field full of smiles" because "he has lived to see the day when his former owner takes him by the hand as a man and brother, and joyfully labors with him as an equal citizen either for or against prohibition." Ayers concluded, rightfully, that "although based in separate organizations, black and white opponents of liquor associated publicly, spoke from the same platform, celebrated together, and warmly talked of each other in their newspapers."⁷⁴ The Texas experience supports these observations.

White religious activists welcomed African American support. "I have learned with great satisfaction that you have undertaken to organize the Negroes of the South in opposition to the Saloon," Baptist B.H. Carroll wrote to his colleague Benjamin Franklin Riley. "This unfortunate people, in their poverty and ignorance have no greater foe than the saloon. If, by any means, they can be led to see that their highest step towards the elevation of their race is to put themselves against this, their deadliest enemy, then such means ought to be employed."⁷⁵ Such means were.

During the 1887 campaign, thousands of prohibitionists rallied on a summer day in Fort Worth. Throughout the day, black and white ministers addressed multiracial

⁷³ Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford, 1976).

⁷⁴ Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 180.

⁷⁵ Benejah Harvey Carroll to Benjamin Franklin Riley, May 3, 1909. Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection.

audiences. White observers commended several of the African American speakers. Rev. A. A. Grant won praise from the *Fort Worth Weekly Gazette*. “His speech ranked high,” the paper read, “and was a pleasing and pleasant surprise to the vast crowd who stood around him and encouraged and interrupted him alternatively by vociferous applause.” Grant wasn’t alone. A black preacher named Samuels, from Texarkana, also spoke. The “colored divine,” the *Gazette* said, “made a speech of considerable length and great force.” The paper reported that he “appealed to his colored friends in eloquent pathos to cast one vote for that freedom which would follow from suppression of the whisky traffic and which would be but little less than that which they obtained when the death of slavery was pronounced in America.”⁷⁶ It commended his “apt illustrations and irresistible witticisms.”⁷⁷

Grant and Samuels were not alone. Several African Americans assumed prominent roles in that year’s campaign. Some worked separately. Politician and black leader M. M. Rodgers chaired the state’s leading black prohibition organization. But others worked together with whites. If their churches were segregated, their moral efforts were, at times, blended.⁷⁸

Methodist Rev. Joshua Hicks of Sulphur Springs, a white man, disregarded anxieties about possible social equality. In social life, he said, the color line was safe. But as for politics, Hicks believed and hoped biracial political cooperation could sink the saloon. Northern reformers, he said, saw “no good reason why the two races should stand arrayed against each other at the ballot-box.” He agreed. “That such is the case here in the

⁷⁶ *Fort Worth Weekly Gazette*, July 8, 1887.

⁷⁷ *Fort Worth Weekly Gazette*, July 8, 1887.

⁷⁸ Alwynn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press), 113.

South, no one can deny.”⁷⁹ Hicks, of course, pushed the limits of southern religious tolerance, and he typically lived on the margins of the religious and political establishment. In a few short years he would join the Populist movement, abandon his Methodist creed, and embrace a host of unpopular positions. But his sentiments reflected the very variety of opinion, and occasional embrace of biracial politics, that defined much of the white prohibition movement.

Much about black churches after Reconstruction paralleled developments in white churches, and many of the same impulses that moved whites also moved blacks. Many religious leaders came to similar judgments. Black leaders also indicted the age’s moral decay and its pervasive irreligion. Moreover, they linked immorality with the plight of black society. They linked their cause with the fate of their race. When African Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop Evans Tyree, a black Tennessean, visited the Northeast Conference of his denomination in Bryan, Texas, in 1906, he himself lamented the “ignorance, idolatry, and superstition” of the African before slavery. Despite the horrors of centuries of slavery, the end of which Tyree was born into, African American had through it been brought to the Christian church, he said. “I have no unkind word for those who owned slaves,” he said. “I can only see the hand of God in it all.” For though slavery visited a great awfulness upon his race, he said, now it was over, and though recent injustices constricted their liberties, still they maintained religious rights that had been absent under slavery. Now, he said, blacks had all the tools for uplifting their race. And, he told the assembled church leaders, they were the ones to wield those tools. “It is our duty to teach our people righteous living,” he said, “teach them to be honorable and

⁷⁹ Hicks Scrapbook, quoted in Davidson, *Race and Class*, xxiii.

upright in the sight of God and man.” Whatever his appropriation of pro-slavery Christianity, he saw morality as the means for racial salvation.⁸⁰

As racial hatred spread throughout the land, Tyree urged vigilance. “We can not afford to be careless,” he said. “The negro must build character. We must live and practice morality in this country or we can not hope to amount to anything. We are character-builders. You must build up character, and when you do this you will find that we have many friends. Complaints and wailings never yet raised a people. Stopping to quarrel with the stick that trips you up does not help you on your journey. Races are lifted up like kites by the adverse current, and often the greatest blessings are brought to us by the heaviest storms.” Tyree urged racial uplift through personal righteousness. “If a man calls me a monkey I know he is mistaken, because I have two legs, and I may not be able to convince him by argument, but my work will tell.” Tyree championed the moral leadership of righteous blacks. He told the assembled leaders to “reach out to that class of negroes who are taking us to destruction.” He, speaking to equals among his “class,” urged workers to target the lesser class.⁸¹

Waco Reverend G.B. Young agreed with Tyree and said “it will pay our young people to listen to Bishop Tyree and if they fail then we may expect trouble.”⁸² All across Texas, black religious leaders preached a gospel of morality and right living that conformed to the expectations of white reformers. And yet, for all of the rhetoric of black religious leaders in the prohibition movement, the reality of black support never matched the dreams of many prohibitionists.

⁸⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, December 1, 1906.

⁸¹ *Dallas Morning News*, December 1, 1906.

⁸² *Dallas Morning News*, December 1, 1906.

As with any community, black Texans exhibited their own social and cultural divisions. Many identified a better sort and a worst sort within their own race. In Paris, Texas, for instance, the site of the infamous lynching, middle-class black leaders carved out a measure of prominence and prosperity. Two African Americans served on the city council and another on the school board. The best sort often traveled in the churches. Church rooted African Americans into communities. But economic progress brought an influx of working-class blacks unmoored from the black establishment and the black churches, from the ingredients of the better sort of black Texans. Henry Smith was one of those. Prosperous and middle-class black leaders assisted in his heinous 1893 lynching. Black community leaders joined in his capture, and others volunteered to assist in the execution.⁸³ They believed that by their cooperation they could stand apart from the South's tragic descent into barbarism; they believed that if they acceded to some element of white barbarism, the gates to citizenship and respectability might open before them. Embracing prohibition became part of that process.

Henry Smith's lynching occurred in a context. Economic integration shifted populations, grew cities, and unsettled old things. Strange new populations troubled whites just as they troubled blacks. White newspapers peppered their pages with editorials blasting the behavior of recently arrived blacks and of the newer generation of black youth. As they berated the behavior of the new, they praised the old, deeply rooted "better sort" of blacks. Obituaries of deceased blacks lauded the "old time negroes."⁸⁴ But the new generation, these paternalistic whites said, had forgotten their place, turned their backs on righteousness, and descended into barbarism. The general hostility of black

⁸³ Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South*, 22.

⁸⁴ Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South*, 25.

populations toward prohibition evidenced all of that. Politics and racism flowed together. “At the same time as Smith’s death,” noted historian Walter Buenger, “demands for sobriety, order, and good government peppered political debate in all parts of Northeast Texas.”⁸⁵ Black populations could contradict white expectations by embracing moral legislation and cementing their claim to the “better sort” of Texans. Or they could conform to prejudice, give credence to white suspicions, and vote against moral legislation.

Although many African American leaders supported the moral crusade, and many black preachers spoke loudly against the saloon, the vast majority of black Texans never followed suit. Removed from middle-class Protestant moralism and hesitant to embrace restrictive legislation, most voted against prohibition. The work of the righteous few would never overcome this undeniable fact. Throughout the moral mania of the turn of the twentieth century, many leading black figures joined the majority of black voters and supported the antis. Reverend Melvin Wade, a prominent black leader of Reconstruction Texas, opposed prohibition. Erstwhile Populist leader John B. Rayner received brewers’ funds and stumped across the state opposing the crusade.⁸⁶ Even “Sin Killer” Griffin courted the brewers for cash and helped organize black voters against the prohibition mania.

Many of the same sentiments that motivated white anticlerics also induced black opposition. A general disdain for pie-in-the-sky creedalism—along with the allure of financial compensation—moved John Rayner toward the antiprohibition movement. He slammed the “hotel flunkies, barbers, dude school teachers, ignorant preachers, [and]

⁸⁵ Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South*, 25.

⁸⁶ Barr, *Black Texans*, 113.

saloon waiters” that he said comprised the state’s black establishment.⁸⁷ The preachers and their moral zealotry, he said, blocked black progress with emotion and superstition. “You cannot reason with intolerant bigotry,” he wrote privately, “nor discuss with religious fanaticism.”⁸⁸ His criticisms echoed the southern race leader Booker T. Washington, who was himself known to crack anticlerical jokes to emphasize his practical, here-and-now program.⁸⁹

In Texas, many African American churches maintained their resistance to moral reform. Although black preachers endeavored to sustain a vibrant tradition of black political engagement, many religious African American southerners reflected the same anticlerical sentiments then grounding many whites. Conservatives in the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church played to white anxieties by railing against political entanglements. When the organization formed in 1870, it borrowed the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. But the CME amended it further to explicitly disassociate itself from worldly work. The body decreed church buildings “shall in no wise be used for political purposes or assemblages.” “As ministers of the Gospel,” Bishop Lucious H. Holsey explained, “we make no stump speeches and fight no battles of the politicians.” He pointed to the white churches as a model. “There was no Politics in the establishment of their Church by their white brethren in the South,” he said. “They are only to follow Jesus Christ and his Religion.” The sentiment was not Holsey’s alone. One black Georgian complained “there was a General hue and cry to cast Politics out from the Church and he himself had been threatened with expulsion from his own Church

⁸⁷ Douglas Hales, *A Southern Family in White and Black: The Cuneys of Texas* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 84.

⁸⁸ J. B. Rayner to S. T. Morgan, September 19, 1907, quoted in *The Brewers and Texas Politics*, vol. II (San Antonio, Tex.: Passing Show Print Company, 1916), 732.

⁸⁹ Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 164.

for asserting his civil and legal rights.”⁹⁰ Prohibition campaigns inevitably crystallized such rhetoric, as when a black preacher in 1887 accused his prohibitionist counterparts of “converting the Sunday school rooms into political halls.”⁹¹ Such hostility would undo the good will earned by black prohibitionists.

Despite the work of idealists and activists, the prohibitionists could never disassociate the vast majority of African Americans from antiprohibition. Everywhere black voices rose against prohibition, and everywhere whites were listening. While the “better sort” of blacks stood by them, whites said, the black masses succumbed to vice and corruption. Prohibitionists could not help but imagine most black Texans as anything but obstacles on the road to moral reform. When sixty black delegates joined a “true blue” antiprohibition rally in Dallas in 1887, observers noted the easy association. “Mixed up with the Texas people,” a friendly reporter waxed, “they feel like the old times had come again and the long, long estrangement was over.” Such hopes proved fanciful, of course, but the delegates were not confined to balconies. They worked in committees and even successfully amended several resolutions. Melvin Wade, a black labor leader and Republican, addressed the gathering of congressmen and judges and other leading citizens. “I think differently from any who have spoken to-day,” he said. “I have reason to be uneasy. I hear you gray-headed old white men, rocked all your lives in the cradle of liberty. Now if you are fearful of your liberty,” he said to applause, “what do you suppose I must feel?” Wade and others had suffered under the law for generations and would feel the further sting of restrictive legislation in the coming decades. “The burnt child, as they say, fears the fire, and if we colored people haven’t been burnt, God

⁹⁰ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 151.

⁹¹ *Dallas Morning News*, May 5, 1887.

only knows who has.” He pledged his support to the True Blues. Several other black delegates echoed his support.⁹²

The strength of African American resistance doomed black political life. No matter how vocal the support of prohibition from some black leaders—support that white prohibitionists courted, praised, and appreciated—white prohibitionists could never shake their conviction that the “worse sort” of black voters dominated the African American electorate. Conventional wisdom aligned with voting patterns: black Texans opposed prohibition. Time and again, black votes sank prohibition and other moral reforms.⁹³ Close contests crystallized the importance of the black vote. To religious whites anxious to secure their stake in public life, the “inferior class” of blacks had to be silenced. As Baptist titan B. H. Carroll reflected, “In the great campaign of ’87 it was the almost solid Negro vote that defeated State Prohibition.”⁹⁴

To avoid further defeat, prohibitionists said, the voting rolls must be purged. Reformers moved toward disfranchisement of all the worse sorts. Prohibition and disfranchisement flowed together. Moral leaders increasingly linked elements of the black population with moral and electoral corruption. Through their votes they became the core element of the “worse sort.” They blocked progress. They opposed the godly commonwealth. And so they had to be purged.

In the early twentieth century, Texans disfranchised broad swaths of the population. Through a combination of poll taxes, white primaries, violence, intimidation,

⁹² *Dallas Morning News*, May 5, 1887.

⁹³ See Jared Paul Sutton, “Ethnic Minorities and Prohibition in Texas, 1887-1919” (M.A. Thesis, University of North Texas, 2006).

⁹⁴ Benejah Harvey Carroll to Benjamin Franklin Riley, May 3, 1909, Benejah Havey Carroll Collection.

and fraud, Texas had substantially suppressed political participation by 1908.⁹⁵ But if grassroots fraud and intimidation overwhelmingly targeted black Texans, some legislation, such as the poll tax, targeted the worse sort of all races and ethnicities. By purging voter rolls with race-blind poll taxes, reformers hoped to purify the electorate and empower the respectable best sort of citizen. The opinions of the state's legislative architect of disfranchisement reflected this neat adherence to a cross-racial, best-and-the-rest belief.

Alexander Watkins Terrell spearheaded voting restrictions in the state legislature. After first proposing a poll tax in the 1870s, he never relented. The son of slaveholders and husband to a daughter of slaveholders, he detested black political participation. He labeled the Fifteenth Amendment "the political blunder of the century." But Terrell hardly esteemed the votes of poor whites, either. He detested their suffrage, as well. Although early in life an anti-prohibitionist and religious skeptic, Watkins later joined the prohibition movement and aligned himself with the state's progressive politics. His arguments for disfranchisement flowed across the color line and arrived at the division between the best and the worst.⁹⁶ "Whether universal manhood suffrage is good for the country," Terrell wrote in 1906, "depends entirely on the sort of men who vote." He aimed the poll tax indiscriminately across the color line. He targeted "the thriftless, idle and semi-vagrant elements of both races."⁹⁷ Others echoed his arguments.

As Terrell's work suggests, reformers led the way to disfranchisement. Baptist Pat M. Neff steered voting restrictions through the state legislature. He introduced the poll

⁹⁵ Barr, *Black Texans*, 113.

⁹⁶ See Lewis L. Gould, *Alexander Watkins Terrell: Civil War Soldier, Texas Lawmaker, American Diplomat* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2004).

⁹⁷ Quoted in Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 202.

tax amendment in the state legislatures of 1899 and 1901.⁹⁸ Later in life, he said it “had nothing to do with the Negroes. ... We drys put that in there to keep the wets from stealing elections from us.”⁹⁹ Neff defended prohibition as governor in the 1920s and later served fifteen years as president of Baylor. He perfectly captures the nexus of religious conviction, political reform, and disfranchisement. Typical of electoral reformers, he believed the worst elements of the African American vote, as well as that of Hispanics and Germans, joined with poor whites and impeded the flowering of godly politics.¹⁰⁰ Disfranchisement followed.

Agrarians, workers, blacks, and Republicans all organized against voting restrictions. They were unsuccessful. The “Terrell Election Law” passed the state legislature in 1903.¹⁰¹ Another set of restrictions passed two years later. The laws imposed a noncumulative poll tax, a secret ballot, and allowed counties to implement a white primary. Political scientist V.O. Key called such restrictions a *fait accompli*, a simple codification of an already realized disfranchisement wrought by violence, fraud, and disorganization. Historian J. Morgan Kousser and others, however, have pointed to substantial black political participation in the years leading up to the restrictions. Regardless, voting restrictions crippled political participation thereafter. The white vote was cut in half, and black political participation nearly disappeared.¹⁰² With black voters’ political stake diminished, cooperation with the black “better sort” faded from the

⁹⁸ Buenger, *The Path to a New South*, 88; Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 275.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Patrick L. Cox and Michael Phillips, *The House Will Come to Order: How the Texas Speaker Became a Power in State and National Politics* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2010), 22

¹⁰⁰ “Reformers more than any other faction led the way to segregation,” wrote Walter Buenger. Buenger, *The Path to a New South*, 29.

¹⁰¹ In 1903, the state’s Democratic executive committee decreed participation for “all races except negroes.” *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide for 1904* (Galveston: Clarke & Courts, 1904), 35.

¹⁰² Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 208.

prohibitionists' view. Stained with corruption and drained of electoral strength, African Americans became increasingly irrelevant to the reformers' political calculus. Submerged within the worse sort, they became obstacles to reform. Notions of black agency faded and efforts at racial cooperation dissolved.

In June, two- to three-hundred black Texans attended an antiprohibition rally and barbecue in Fort Worth's Douglas Park. It paralleled a whites-only meeting in progress at the Fort Worth auditorium. Beer and barbecue flowed at the park and an all-black band interspersed speeches by a "colored contingent." The mayor had planned to address both crowds but canceled at the last moment. Turnout was low, and little was said or done of interest.¹⁰³ A few days later, at the opening of the 1911 prohibition campaign in Dallas, Cone Johnson denounced the meeting. In Douglas Park, Johnson said, the keynote speaker had warned of an inevitable hike in the price of alcohol if prohibition was enacted. "No dodging the issue there," Johnson said, "no attempt by this unsophisticated negro to becloud the main issue; he toed the mark and announced the gospel."¹⁰⁴ Black Texans, he said, were slaves to the bottle. It was unavoidable. He failed to mention the best class of blacks. They had, it seemed, been dissolved into the worst sort.

Reformers generally turned their back on black voters. They revoked elite black membership in the better sort. In 1914, the *Baptist Standard* called prohibition "a struggle for a higher Anglo-Saxon civilization against the slum civilization of the great cities."¹⁰⁵ In lily-white primary elections, a limited form of racial politics pushed both sides toward race-baiting. In the 1912 elections, prohibitionist candidates Cone Johnson and Morris

¹⁰³ *Dallas Morning News*, June 6, 1911.

¹⁰⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, June 9, 1911.

¹⁰⁵ *Baptist Standard*, July 30, 1914, quoted in Lewis L. Gould, "Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democratic Politics, 1911-1921," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 75 (July 1971).

Sheppard accused antiprohibitionist Jacob Wolters of intending to vote African Americans in South Texas. Wolters denied it. He lauded his “record in the fight for the supremacy of the white man” and supplied telegrams from South Texas county officials testifying that “negroes never vote in the Democratic primaries in our section of the State.” The letter said “Jake Wolters was one of the men conspicuous in the fight for a white man’s government and the elimination of the negro from local politics.”¹⁰⁶

Prohibitionists increasingly lumped all blacks into the anti-prohibitionist camp. Despite the best effort of reformers to foster the black “best sort,” overwhelming opposition to liquor reform marked most blacks as members of the worst sort. Indicted in the public mind, some black leaders still sought redemption in the prohibition movement. If blacks could be seen supporting the dry cause, they reasoned, they would scrub clean the patina of corruption. They would inject themselves firmly into the “better” camp.¹⁰⁷ But they were too few in number. And reformers’ efforts at disfranchisement, targeted at the “worse sort,” drove most of the remaining black prohibitionists back to the antis.

Although most prohibitionists refused to raise the dreaded specter of racial equality in their efforts, some did, linking votes for the saloon with votes for equality. After a local option defeat in Bell County, the *Belton Reporter* attributed African American opposition to prohibition as evidence of the leveling effects of alcohol. “The negroes,” it read, “say they vote for whisky because at the polls and in the saloons are the only places where they can be equal with the white folks.”¹⁰⁸ Although designed to denigrate its opponents, the article hinted at a growing truth. One brewer put it best when

¹⁰⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, July 24, 1912.

¹⁰⁷ Barr, *Black Texans*, 113.

¹⁰⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, February 16, 1886. “Whisky is a powerful agency in overcoming race prejudices, especially before elections,” the *News* wrote.

he praised black antiprohibitionists who, “without pay, took the platform in defense of liberty of conscience and citizenship qualification.”¹⁰⁹ Antiprohibitionists recognized black yearnings for citizenship. They exploited that yearning. “If they [“The negro”] can be brought to realize that the holding of a poll tax receipt is the best asset they can possess to gain standing in the community in which they live, it ought to be a convincing argument to stimulate them to qualify as voters.”¹¹⁰ Blacks advanced this argument themselves. M.H. Broyles, a professor at Prairie View and a prominent black Texan, organized a session of the Texas Negro Convention in 1911. “Special stress,” he wrote, “will be put upon the question of the payment of poll taxes as a necessary part of the duties incident to good citizenship, it being our aim to especially stimulate an interest on the part of our people in their qualifying themselves in every way to become worthy citizens.”¹¹¹ For despite severe restrictions, Texas’s emphasis on the best and the rest meant that blacks could still vote in general elections. Even in diminished numbers, they remained a crucial voting bloc. They still swayed elections.

Local election saw prohibitionists and antiprohibitionists compete for black votes. “The election in Caldwell County was very close,” one anti wrote in 1911, “in fact, the negro vote, to a certain extent, controlled the situation.”¹¹² Another, in Navarro county, recognized that “the colored vote was the balance of power.”¹¹³ Black votes were still crucial. Antis courted them, and many prohibitionists had not forsaken black populations. “We ought to be doing missionary work among the colored brethren without delay, as the

¹⁰⁹ Oscar Paget, Report, January 7, 1909, in *The Brewers and Texas Politics*, 611.

¹¹⁰ R. L. Autrey, January 15, 1913, in *The Brewers and Texas Politics*, 310.

¹¹¹ H. M. Broyles to H. Prince and H. Hamilton, December 7, 1911, in *The Brewers and Texas Politics*, 1523.

¹¹² Otto Warmund to O. Paget, March 15, 1911, in *The Brewers and Texas Politics*, 648.

¹¹³ O. Paget to John E. Weeden, September 23, 1911, in *The Brewers and Texas Politics*, 957

enemy is hot after them at this moment,” one of the brewers’ political agents wrote during a typical campaign.¹¹⁴ The black leader and organizer J.B. Rayner, who received brewers’ funds and worked against prohibition, reminded his benefactors that his speeches and organizing kept black Texans “from making campaign thunder for the intolerant and fanatical prohibitionists.”¹¹⁵ But the pros were losing. They could never capture the black vote. The brewers paid poll taxes. Their agents protected black voters from intimidation. Black newspapers editorialized against prohibition. Prohibitionists never gained more than a small foothold among the black population, so white reformers retreated. The “better sort” began to align more closely with racial lines than across them. Exhortations to the best class of black Texans evaporated.

Over the course of the clerical insurgency, prohibitionists had worked with black leaders. They had courted black votes. But, in the main, they had been rebuffed. Their conception of the best and the rest ruled for a time, but political realities crippled interracial cooperation. Yet scholars are wrong to argue that prohibition succeeded only because of racism. Prohibitionists clung to morality, not merely to race. Many prohibitionists, of course, deployed racist rhetoric. Many alternated between hostility and apathy. Most, however, were satisfied in their prejudice. At times they have engaged in what historians have called “race making.” Some resorted to violence and insults and vulgarity. But, in the main, prohibitionists lived their lives unburdened, or unchallenged, by the “Negro question.” Historians can try to entwine racial narratives into a biracial history—but it is the narrative that makes them one, not their history. Perhaps this is the crueler tale. Some issues flowed across racial lines. Sometimes common causes united

¹¹⁴ Oscar Paget, Report, August 1908, sent September 2, 1908, in *The Brewers and Texas Politics*, 37, 262.

¹¹⁵ J.B. Rayner to Otto Wahrmond, July 9, 1912, in *The Brewers and Texas Politics*, 68.

black and white Texans; sometimes hate and enmity divided them. For the most part, however, white religious leaders lived white lives in white worlds, secure—not anxious—in their roles in the racial hierarchy. It was within that hierarchical world that the clerical crusade could cross racial lines in pursuit of the best class.

Prohibitionists made the Bible Belt by marking morality, by drawing lines between the “best” and the “rest.” In the end, they succeeded because they could both incorporate and transcend southern racism. They could unite a mostly white community using only religion and politics. They founded the Bible Belt on more than race. They built it upon a broader idea, upon a sense of righteousness. This is what lingered. This was the belief that transplanted itself into Southern California and Michigan and other nontraditional strongholds of southern religion. There, just as in the South, religious activists could learn to vilify hostile blacks and whites together. They would target secular opponents, liberals, the poor, the “elites.” Their enmity would draw upon race, but not only race. Because, under the marker of morality, they would be the best class. They would be the righteous, they would fight for God, and, of course, their opponents would not.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Unto the Breach: The Politics of Clericalism

After the humiliating defeats of the 1880s, clerical leaders regrouped and rebuilt their movement from the ground up. As the old generation of anticlerical self-consciousness washed away, a new and aggressive tide of clerical activism crested. Professionalized leaders conquered the denominations, the publishing houses, and the major urban pulpits. Memberships grew and money poured into religious coffers. Denominational colleges were well-funded and well-attended. Religious periodicals won vast circulations. Boards and private ventures blossomed. And within these expanding denominational worlds, clerics crafted and deployed a usable history and pioneered new and alluring visions of church and state. They had captured the cultural high ground. They wrought morality into an identity and created a best-and-the-rest social division that both incorporated and transcended traditional southern prejudices. They purged the electorate of the “worst sort.” At the beginning of the twentieth century, everything was in place for the religious conquest of public life. The foundations for the Bible Belt had been laid.

As the new century began, clericalism boomed. The aggressive clerical mood penetrated the deepest ranks of religious leadership and convinced evangelical Texans to overcome their doubts and refuse to yield to a culture of anticlericalism. From their seats of denominational power, religious leaders lashed out. All over the state—and all over the region—isolated activists cultivated the clerical movement.

Everywhere, moral reform was rising. Clerics were organizing locally. Activists moved with momentum, confidence, and resources. Activism bowled over internal restraint. Every prohibition rally, every local-option election, and every Sunday sermon reinforced a growing movement. Hesitant holdouts embraced the clerical vision. The crusade grew. Legions of clergymen and laypeople alike undertook the prohibition crusade. Moral reforms attracted massive numbers, mobilized communities, created new organizations and institutions, and ultimately transformed the very nature of religion in Texas. Politics and Christianity became increasingly intertwined, grafted together so seamlessly that the two seemed indistinguishable. The churches rallied around reform and worked locally. Pockets of clerical aggression toppled local regimes. Religious leaders preached the prohibition gospel. Working through organizations such as the Texas Local Option Association and the Anti-Saloon League, religious leaders saturated Texas with literature and organizers and lecturers, and over the course of several decades they dried up great swaths of the state. Activists fought county by county in local option elections. And they were winning. Counties were going dry. A smarter, leaner, and more committed movement was swelling. And it was about to burst.

Church leaders raised funds, coordinated campaigns, and pushed their agenda into the forefront of public discourse. They captured most of North Texas and large parts of Central and East Texas—but then stalled. They dried the regions where white southerners clung to evangelical churches. They had picked the low-hanging fruit. Religious leaders faced a stalemate. So they forsook the local-option system. The conditions for a larger

clerical emergence had already been set. They turned to the state.¹ And they provoked the greatest clash between religious activism and anticlerical hostility in Texas history.

Clerics did not march unimpeded into public life. If clerics had conquered internal dissent, they still had to confront a secular world's age-old anticlericalism. The churches had been easy. It took relatively little effort to convince Texans with a stake in spiritual life that religion was besieged, that religion mattered, that the righteous should organize, and that they should act. But the conquest of public life would be different, and in politics, clericalism and anticlericalism collided.

At first, public life rebuked religious politics. As in the previous century, to many mainstream southerners, a minister's place was his pulpit and his focus was spiritual. A prevailing anticlericalism demanded anything more be met with great walls of condemnation. Venom and vitriol were a cleric's reward, and vicious waves of anticlericalism unleashed scorn upon "political preachers." While religious leaders mobilized, anticlerics fretted. In 1907, an attorney in Corsicana concluded that the "union of church and state is the hope of every preacher in Texas."² Worried Texans organized opposition and braced for battle. They held the line across the state, but their scattered opposition failed to slow the prohibition frenzy or prevent its entry into statewide politics. They regrouped, formed a firewall in state politics, and awaited the clerical crusade.

It came under the guise of prohibition. Religious activists pushed other reforms, of course. Sabbath laws, anti-prostitution crusades, anti-gambling movements, and religious education all drew followers. But none so riled the world as prohibition. The

¹ For the emergence of prohibition within statewide progressive politics, see especially Lewis L. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 43-45.

² W. W. Ballew to G. C. Pendleton, September 17, 1907, Alexander Dienst Collection, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

antiliquor movement coalesced a cultural struggle. It was the vehicle for the Bible Belt. Clerics used the issue as a battering ram that could smash barriers and open breaches for armies of motivated evangelicals. Their adversaries called it an “ecclesiastical invasion” and urged its opponents to “scourge them back,” but with prohibition the clergy had found a lever to move the world. For well over a decade, the scandal of prohibition—and political Christianity—dominated public debate in Texas and across the South.

The push for prohibition brought discord, conflict, and controversy. At the turbulent intersection of religion, politics, and public culture, religious reformers and anxious anticlerics crashed headlong into controversy. The rancorous statewide contests for prohibition revealed a desperate battle between the proponents of an aggressive, politicized religion and the defenders of a traditional, inward-looking evangelicalism, between those who believed religion should reign in public life and those who believed it should not—between clericalism and anticlericalism. Never hidden, this conflict was consciously waged, conspicuously fought, and frequently commented upon. Through the politics of prohibition, clerics and anticlerics vied for legitimacy. Clerics declared their political rights and boldly wrestled their way into the political debate. Anticlerics struggled to stifle the insurgency. But for the first time in Texas history, religious leaders struck back.

Texas was not alone. Evangelical activists thrust themselves into public life throughout the South.³ Prohibition burned across the region. In 1907 Georgia became the

³ As Ted Ownby wrote, “Evangelicalism, so long a vital part of Southern private life, had by early in the twentieth century become central to the public life of the region.” Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 210-11. Speaking specifically to southern prohibitionists, Joe L. Coker wrote that “evangelicals turned increasingly outward in orientation,” and “increased [their] involvement in the realm of secular politics.” Joe L. Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause: Southern White Evangelicals and the Prohibition Movement* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 37, 56.

first southern state to go dry. Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Mississippi quickly followed. By 1915 nine southern states prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcohol. Texas was not yet among them.⁴ The peculiarities of Lone Star culture, demographics, and politics kept the prohibition issue burning. And it kept the battle between clericalism and anticlericalism lodged in the forefront of the public consciousness. For a time, two titans stalemated. Their fiery battle settled into a slow burn. Unlike other southern states, Texas neither decisively defeated nor passed prohibition: the two sides matched weight. They stayed in the fight.

For well over a decade, liquor politics dominated public life in Texas. Congressional contests fell along wet-dry lines. Four consecutive gubernatorial contests (1910, 1912, 1914, and 1916) divided over little more than prohibition. Voters debated the submission of a statewide constitutional prohibition on four occasions (1908, 1910, 1914, and 1917). With prohibition in politics, the whole state erupted into discussions on the proper public role of preachers. Political religion and anticlericalism tumbled into politics.

Before religious leaders could earn H.L. Mencken's derision, before outsiders could recognize anything approaching a "Bible Belt," clerics had to conquer greater obstacles at home. Through the pursuit of moral issues, they did. They had challenged a culture—and won. After decades of unrestrained agitation they overwhelmed the inertia of tradition and forever redefined the limits of permissible religious action. Historical barriers crumbled, the anticlerics were routed, and the Bible Belt was won. Public opinion indicted activist religious leaders, but clerics fought back. They pressed on. By

⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, October 31, 1909.

World War I they found themselves capable of dictating the terms of public debate, of engaging the political sphere, and of policing a culture.

The new and aggressive religious culture of the South reigned, but its rise to power had not come naturally. The recurrent political strife testified to the controversy of the Bible Belt. It had been a process. Southern anticlericalism, to borrow a line about Rome, had not died naturally; it was assassinated.⁵ The Bible Belt was not a natural or logical culmination of impersonal and unavoidable trends: it was planned and deliberate. The clerics had traveled a long road. But they had traveled it. The statewide struggle for prohibition marked the most important stretch of that long journey. The clerics' final battle would be in politics.

The first years of the twentieth century witnessed the culmination of the culture of clericalism. All of the denomination-building, history-writing, and political organizing coalesced into a broad movement for statewide prohibition. As internal restraints were lifted, activists rushed into the world. Everywhere they looked, anticlericalism seemed to be in decay. The old guard had passed. William Cowper Brann, the iconoclast, was dead. Everywhere clerics were embroiled in local politics. Their allies captured local offices. The religious voices pushing for broader political engagement grew ever louder.

All across the state, clerics rallied their followers to war. At a 1905 meeting of the Baptist Pastors' Conference in Dallas, church leaders pushed for activism. A reporter from the *Western Recorder* hoped "to take fire and inspiration back home."⁶ He did. Speakers urged the assembled pastors to get into politics and fight for righteousness. Rev.

⁵ "Roman civilization did not die a natural death. It was assassinated." Andre Piganiol, *L'Empire Chrétien* 325-395, (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1947), 422.

⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, November 15, 1905. In addition to advocating political action, the pastors pushed each other to purge heterodoxies, convert foreigners, and proclaim "the World-Wide Baptist Spirit."

E. E. King, of McKinney, discussed “The Pastor’s Relations to Current Questions.” He added to the chorus demanding that preachers engage politics. “When the wicked rule the people mourn,” he said. Preachers should not be complicit. “It is to be feared that the pastor has in some instances, by his timid if not cowardly silence as to politics, contributed to the groans and tears of his people.” To abstain was, in effect, to license. He asked: “Is he not set as a watchman on the walls of a city, who seeing an evil coming on the land should speak to the glory of God and the saving of a people?”⁷

At a meeting of the ecumenical Dallas Pastors’ Association in 1907, Rev. J. W. Hill of Dallas’s First Methodist Church delivered a paper on “civic righteousness.” He spoke of the minister’s role in public life. Should he “advocate or oppose any suggested legislation, or should by word or pen espouse any cause that has its final settlement at the ballot box—this is a question that has elicited much discussion.” He decided that ministers should. Legislators, he said, would never find morality or ethics by themselves. Ministers had to act as teachers and guides, “to fit and adjust the shifting sands of civil enactment until they shall conform to the granite configuration of the eternal principles of righteousness.” Religious leaders must not only exemplify morality, he said, they must actively promote it. He laid the issue bare: “The issues are joined. The conflict is between what he [the preacher] believes to be right and what he thinks to be wrong. Neutrality is out of the question. Trimming or fence riding is morally impossible. Jesus said, ‘he that is not for me, is against me,’ and it will hardly be denied that every principle embodied in civil enactment, which has a moral bearing, either furthers the cause or retards the progress of our Lord’s gospel among men.”⁸

⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, November 15, 1905.

⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, February 5, 1907.

Everywhere the statewide movement was coalescing. Nascent fundamentalist leader J. Frank Norris declared that preachers had “political as well as pulpit rights.”⁹ Methodist minister and editor George Rankin began winning headlines with his forceful political harangues.¹⁰ “I hold that it is the duty of every Christian to go into politics and stay in,” Baptist pastor and editor James B. Gambrell wrote.¹¹ Such rhetoric soon spread beyond the pulpit and took hold among the pews.

In a 1909 meeting of the Dallas Baptist Pastors’ and Laymen’s Conference, future state governor and Baylor University president Pat Neff, then county attorney for McLennan County, said this about the “Christian citizen:” “Crowned with the glories of war and decked with the flowers of peace, robed in the mantle of religious freedom, holding in one hand the constitution of his country and in the other the Bible of his God,” the Christian citizen “stands today before the world the biggest, and the best, the noblest and the divinest gift this earth holds up to its maker.” He urged all Christians to engage with the world and not isolate themselves within the individual, “to be absorbed and satisfied” with the self. Instead, he said, “the Bible standard of success and greatness is service.” Therefore, he said, “every Christian ought to be a politician to the extent of taking an active interest in every public or political question that touches the morals or the material prosperity of the people.” Tumultuous times demanded righteous engagement. “It was criminal,” he thought, “to be silent when your country needs your voice.”¹²

⁹ *Baptist Standard*, February 18, 1909, quoted in Storey, 25.

¹⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, January 26, 1909.

¹¹ *Baptist Standard*, April 2, 1908, quoted in Storey, 26.

¹² *Baptist Standard*, February 10, 1910, quoted in Storey, 26.

Other prominent laymen supported the movement. In 1909, prominent attorney Silas C. Padelford defended the preachers' push for statewide prohibition. He reinforced the backbone of the clerical claims: preachers "demand merely the right and privilege of free men" to "the right to an untrammelled vote." But few now relied on such a narrow argument, and Padelford embraced new ones as well. He, like the clerics, drew the world in two. He said two forces pulled at the souls of man. "Most every person," he wrote, "turns either to the spirit of his God or the spirit of the devil—the liquid dispensed at the saloon." Liquor blocked religious progress, and religion should be unhindered. Anything that blocked religious progress therefore became a proper political target. "Anything that destroys the human soul, anything that destroys reputation, anything that injures the home, anything that impairs the course of pure religion anything that destroys the benevolent influence of the church is fit and proper to be denounced from the pulpit." He said "It is the burden duty of the ministers to oppose by all honorable means and to destroy if possible this traffic." Padelford minced no words. Condemning a state senator's efforts to stifle clerical activism, he said "there are a few in the Senate who are desiring to enact a law to render criminal those ministers of the Gospel who raise their voices in the pulpit against the greatest enemy of God and humanity."¹³

The chorus of clericalism sang across the state. No gathering better captured the energy of the movement than the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The body gathered for its annual meeting in the fall of 1908. It was electric. President R. C. Buckner struggled in vain to tame the crowd. He used a large songbook as a gavel and spoke against "all of this applause and rejoicing." "Let's not indulge in this, please," he pleaded, "This is not customary." But this was not a typical Baptist meeting. It

¹³ *Dallas Morning News*, February 23, 1909.

proceeded, the newspapers reported, “in the nature of a big prohibition rally.”¹⁴ It was a celebration. The convention rejoiced in a “banner year.” Never before had more churches been built or more people baptized. The Baptist body reveled in its accomplishments. Religious workers, the state missions board reported, delivered more than 40,000 sermons, distributed 1,000,000 pages of religious literature, secured nearly 20,000 new members, and organized over 200 new churches. The meeting was magnetic. It stood in relief against the depressed meetings during the depths of the spiritual crisis. The mood even washed over Buckner. When one speaker related his personal account of the power of God among businessmen, passions boiled over. The convention spontaneously sang “Blessed be the name of the Lord.” Buckner broke down and admitted “that to sit in this convention was almost like being with God in Heaven.”¹⁵

Moral reform dominated the meeting. Activists pushed the church into a number of reforms. Dr. J. L. Gross of Houston’s First Baptist read a report on “Sabbath Observance.” “Whatever tends to destroy reverence for the Lord’s Day,” he said, “will also impair the influence of the Lord on the hearts and lives of the people, and thus strike a death blow to the heart of our churches.” The fate of the nation depended upon the fate of the churches. “Non-observance,” he said, “will in the end shake the very foundation of our republic.” In the spirit of the times, he rallied the faithful. He called for battle: “We fight to the death with Christian weapons the sentiments, institutions, or practices that in anywise diminishes our Christian Sabbath.” Stores, mail, fairs, shows, saloons, sporting events: they all desecrated the Sabbath. “This,” he said, “is the rottenness at the very heart of our religion.” But instead of surrendering to despair, as had a previous

¹⁴ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 15, 1908.

¹⁵ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 15, 1908.

generation, the gathered Baptists embraced their opportunity for reform. Clerics had to confront Sabbath breakers. “In love and patience, we must convert them to our way of thinking, or else we may lose our country and our religion in its highest and noblest form.” The body adopted the report on Saturday and appointed two preachers to the board of directors of the Sunday League of America. The body moved to petition the state legislature. They moved that legislation be passed protecting the Sabbath. They urged that “no fair, performance, or game can occur on Sunday,” and that a heavy fine be levied in support.¹⁶

But if the Baptists and other leading denominations pushed for a broad moral agenda, prohibition still dominated the clerical movement. No issue could compete with the antiliquor crusade’s visceral appeal. As B. H. Carroll, the elder statesman of the clerical movement, reminded reformers, prohibition “concerns every single vital interest of the people individually and collectively, socially and intellectually, civilly and politically, financially, morally and religiously.” “How can I remain silent?” he asked.¹⁷

The clergy’s wholesale embrace of prohibition propelled that issue into the public arena.¹⁸ Prohibition became *the* political issue of the day. One politician wrote as early as 1905 that “the position of public men upon this question has invited or repelled their following more than their view upon all other questions combined: when the issue becomes acute it dominates every other issue.”¹⁹ It had become acute, and it did dominate every other issue. And, just as in the 1880s, on came an avalanche of anticlerical

¹⁶ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 15, 1908.

¹⁷ Quoted in Harvey, 216.

¹⁸ For the politics of prohibition in the South, see especially Dewey Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 160-177.

¹⁹ Quoted in Lewis L. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 28.

criticism. In rushed the anticlerical resistance. Leaders urged their supporters to “lock their shields in a stern and unbroken front.”²⁰ They hardly needed to be reminded.

Traces of anticlericalism remained within the churches. But only traces. In 1911, for instance, Bishop J.S. Johnson of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Texas rehashed the old religious anticlericalism. He conceded the destructiveness of liquor and castigated the saloons. But he warned his fellow Christians to stay out of politics. “Moral suasion,” he said, should be the domain of the church, not government. He blasted the “unthinking masses,” the “sheep,” who blindly voted as their ministers preached. He reiterated his hate for the liquor dealers and their corruption of politics. But, he said, “Paternalism in the past has been, and we may well believe in the future will continue to be, detrimental to the highest development of individual character.”²¹ But the battle for control of the churches had long since passed. The clerics had won. Once dominant, Johnson’s anticlerical sentiment now set him apart from the majority of religious Texans. Johnson, an elder in a mainline denomination with few Texas members, demonstrated how marginalized anticlericalism had become among evangelical Texans. Some within the mainline still clung to anticlericalism. Rev. W. Irving Carroll, pastor of Dallas’s First Congregational Church, registered his complaint. “I believe in the entire separation of Church and State.” A minister may interfere in spiritual matters, he said, but “has no authority for dictatorial interference in the affairs of society in general.”²² While these men demonstrated the continuing anticlerical commitment from some churches, most of the evangelical denominations had converted or purged their anticlerical members and embraced prohibition. Johnson and Carroll had been passed by. Johnson, an

²⁰ *The Victoria Advocate*, July 18, 1911.

²¹ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 9, 1909.

²² *Dallas Morning News*, February 5, 1907.

Episcopalian, spoke tradition in a world of religious innovation. He could only praise his own denomination for its repudiation of dogmatic prohibitionist creeds. “This is the freest church in the land,” he said. “No other ... allows such latitude of opinion to its ministers and members, on all subjects, when held loyally within the limits of the great fundamental facts of Christianity.” He slammed his rival denominations, Catholic and Protestant both, saying “Protestantism is not without its self-constituted popes.” But Johnson was now mostly alone. Yes, prohibition raised strife. It divided churches. It provoked emotion. And it inspired purges. “The evils resulting from the course now being pursued to enlist the churches, as such, in the present crusade may, in the near future, act like a boomerang, and in the end do untold injury to the cause of Christianity.”²³ He rightly anticipated the fury of anticlerical resistance, but he spoke from a minority position. The times had passed him and his denomination by. The new century belonged to the evangelicals and to the culture of clericalism. But if that culture had conquered the churches, a wary public sphere remained.

In 1901 Georgetown Baptist D.L. Hamilton condemned an anticlerical editorial in the *Houston Daily Post*. He blasted critics of religious politicking. He knew opponents awaited in the public sphere, and he knew they would resist the coming campaigns. “Whenever the devil is disturbed, whether in society or politics, his emissaries are certain to rebel.” He called anticlericalism an “old and threadbare” doctrine, a “relic of the past,” but he knew the fury that awaited the clerics. “No preacher expects anything else but antagonism,” he wrote. Hamilton and other activists steeled themselves against an inevitable backlash. “The preacher who avoids misrepresentation and persecution is one

²³ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 9, 1909.

who never combats evil,” he wrote. The cleric expected the anticleric. The pugnacious culture of clericalism readied for a fight. And they got it.²⁴

Although clerics conquered the churches, secular hostility loomed. As Methodist minister J. W. Hill noted, “Men who never darken the door of a church, and some of whom are confessed and outspoken infidels, are suddenly seized with an agonizing shiver, and quake and tremble for the safety and security of the Christian religion whenever a minister enters the lists in the interest of moral reform and undertakes to apply the principles of the gospel to the civic conditions of the times.”²⁵ Although many would eschew any pretences of saving religion, others clung to the old anticlerical trope of preserving the true faith.

The twentieth century saw new generations fighting old fights. Reverend Arthur W. Jones, an Anti-Saloon League activist, hoped to recapture the sensation of the 1887 debate between Senator Roger Q. Mills and Baptist Benajah Harvey Carroll by challenging Mills’ son, political aspirant Charles H. Mills, to a debate in 1909. Mills declined, saying “My ideas of the duties of ministers in matters both spiritual and temporal are so widely at variance with the views upon like matters entertained by men like Mr. Jones as to make a mutual accommodation between us impossible.” He blasted the clerics. “It is my belief that when the Savior said ‘My kingdom is not of this world,’ and laid down the doctrine that there is a dominion of Cesar and a dominion of the Church, Cesar having nothing to do with the Church nor the Church anything to do with Cesar, that he drew the line clear and distinct between Church and State [*sic*].” Mills previewed all of the anticlerical arguments of the coming decade. “I do not now seek, and

²⁴ *The Houston Daily Post*, November 14, 1901.

²⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, February 5, 1907.

have never sought, to meddle in matters spiritual. They belong to the Church, and are the business of its ministers. Correlatively, I think that ministers, as such, should not meddle in matters political. . . . I hold the ministry in reverence as spiritual advisers. I reject them as emissaries of temporal power.”²⁶

Despite rejection by such critics, the clerical insurgency caught its opponents off guard. Clerics quickly graduated from local to state politics. By 1908 prohibition stalked the corridors of the state capital. Drys lobbied and pleaded with state legislators to put a prohibition amendment to the state constitution on the ballot. Anticlerics recoiled. Stunned, an eclectic mix of hostile Texans immediately formed permanent anti-prohibition organizations. The largest, formed in Houston that October, just prior to the Baptists’ jubilant annual statewide meeting, laid the issue bare: they distrusted religious ambitions, feared for the separation in church and state, and longed to preserve the public sphere unsullied by the churches. Meeting in Houston’s Turner Hall, and greeted personally by Mayor Baldwin Rice, the assembly resolved, first, that prohibition challenged individual liberty, and, second, that “it stands for a standard of citizenship, morals and religion which inevitably leads to a union of church and state.”²⁷ State representative T. H. McGregor told the assembly that “we have learned to tell the difference between the preacher that carries a glad hand and a warm heart and the peripatetic, political preacher that would sow the State with strife.” The rhetoric delighted the crowd. It was, the *Dallas News* said, “like touching a match to prairie grass.” Louis Wortham, another state legislator, warned against “the extremes of fanaticism” and, to great applause, closed his speech by declaring “These fanatics shall not crucify free

²⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, January 26, 1909.

²⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, October 13, 1908.

Americans [sic] upon this cross of intolerance.”²⁸ Others piled on. “I am one of those who believe that the Christian religion is wholly one of moral suasion and ought not to be backed up by the sword,” another speaker declared to cheers. The speakers were not alone. Concerned Texans registered their discontent all across the state.

Anticlerical Texans sought the means to “defeat this pernicious heresy.”²⁹ When the state legislature reconvened some months later, in 1909, state Senator Edward Kellie introduced an incredible bill. He proposed to make it illegal “for any person whomsoever ... in any church house ... to speak, lecture or talk upon political subjects, conditions, or matters.” Kellie proposed criminalizing political preaching. He would make it a misdemeanor, punishable by up to a \$50 fine and ten days in a county jail. His bill was tabled.³⁰ It was a farce, of course, but its sentiments spoke to many and foretold the rash of anticlerical anger soon to be unleashed in the coming prohibition campaigns.

The clerical crusade pushed the issue of religion into the forefront of state politics. The Houston assembly was the first prominent, public expression of anticlericalism in years, but it inaugurated a decade defined by religious controversy. Prohibition grew to dominate public discussion. The issue soon became not merely a political issue, but *the* political issue. It consumed newspaper columns, political rhetoric, and public debate. It quite simply captured the state. For well over a decade, political races in Texas became little more than referendums on prohibition.³¹ And when elections became referendums on prohibition—an overwhelmingly religious issue—they invariably became referendums on religion as well, proxy wars fought over evangelicals’ aggressive public

²⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, October 13, 1908.

²⁹ G. C. Pendleton to P. J. Sury, January 19, 1909. Dienst Collection.

³⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, February 23, 1909

³¹ See, for instance, W. R. Buyauh to Oscar Branch Colquitt, May 16, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers, 1873-1941, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

forays. Traditional boundaries between pulpits and politics seemed to collapse. Prohibition as an issue and evangelicalism as an identity were intertwined.

In the prohibition movement, anti-liquor rallies often became indistinguishable from church services. They closely mirrored a regular Sunday church program in structure and in content. One such meeting in 1908 was fairly typical: Gathering at the county courthouse on a Friday night, the crowd began by singing “Stand Up for Jesus,” and a minister followed with an invocation. Religious hymns interspersed various speakers bemoaning the ills of liquor and touting statewide prohibition. The gathering concluded as the assembly sang “When Christians Shall Vote as They Pray,” and a second minister offered the benediction.³² Anticlerics were sure to recoil. The first decade of the twentieth-century saw the beginnings of a bitter contest, but that contest had only begun. Only in 1910 did the struggle for the Bible Belt explode.

By 1910 clerics had propelled prohibition into the forefront of state politics. Decades of organizing and agitating now spilled out of the churches and up from the counties. The churches exclaimed their wholehearted commitment. Prohibition became gospel. The official position of the North Texas Conference of the Methodist Church in 1909 was typical: “The saloon is the direst enemy of sober manhood, of pure womanhood, and of prattling childhood,” it declared. “It is the arch-enemy of the home, the foe of the university and school, the iconoclast of the age. God grant that the ascending prayers of our Christian men and women may speedily be answered in the destruction and overthrow of the rum traffic in Texas!”³³ A joint letter signed by Methodist and Presbyterian ministers in 1910 predicted that “two great forces will be

³² “Prohibition Rally Program.” Undated. Dienst Collection.

³³ *Minutes of the Forty-third Annual Session of the North Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South* (n.p.: R. G. Mood, 1909).

arrayed against each other. On one side will be found the home, the school and church, and all who labor for morality and the good of our State. On the other side will be found 4,000 saloonkeepers and every evil force associated with the saloon and the brewery.”³⁴

J. B. Gambrell, editor of the *Baptist Standard*, agreed. “The vastest evil, the deadliest evil, the one greatest overshadowing upas tree [a tall, tropical, poisonous tree] of the whole world,” he wrote, “is the organized liquor traffic.” Gambrell eagerly attacked the liquor traffic week after week. “It is an obstruction to the kingdom,” he wrote, “it is a blight on the souls of men; it is the enemy of all good; it blasphemes Almighty God; profanes everything holy, scourges the human race and damns untold millions of souls.”³⁵

The Texas Christian Missionary Society officially proclaimed the saloon a “seductive instrument of the evil one” and “the most blighting curse that blocks the way of Christian progress and defies the armies of the living God.” Intoxicating liquor proved “the greatest tragedy of mankind,” and the liquor traffic was “the most destructive institution that hampers and hinders our Christian civilization.”³⁶

In 1911 Houston attorney Jonathan Lane would write that “These disclaimers [the prohibitionists], as a rule, think the English language insufficient to enable them to express their bitterness, hatred and ill feelings toward those of us who do not agree with them on this subject.”³⁷ But such stark rhetoric pointed to the determined ferocity of crusading clergymen. “The preachers will not take a back seat,” the *Baptist Standard* declared. “We expect them to continue to preach prohibition, talk prohibition and work

³⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, July 21, 1910.

³⁵ *Baptist Standard*, March 18, 1911.

³⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, May 13, 1910.

³⁷ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* June 5, 1911.

for prohibition.”³⁸ Clergymen of all denominations “locked shields for the purpose of destroying the liquor business,” the *Dallas Morning News* said.³⁹ “We favor precinct prohibition, county prohibition, and Statewide prohibition, the utter annihilation of the saloons,” declared the Methodist’s North Texas Conference. “The Church is the eternal foe of the saloon and the licensed liquor traffic and will never be satisfied until the legalized sale of liquor shall cease in Texas.”⁴⁰ J. B. Cranfill, a former editor of the *Baptist Standard*, a trustee of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and later the vice president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, expressed overwhelming pride in his dedication to prohibition. “My attitude on the temperance and prohibition question,” he wrote in 1916, “has been that I was a friend to every movement, and every man that looked to the annihilation of the drink traffic. I have fought for prohibition in precinct, county, state and nation, and am still fighting for it.”⁴¹

As such rhetoric suggests, by 1910 renouncing prohibition was tantamount to renouncing Christianity. While political rallies often resembled religious services, so too the reverse. Religious revivals focused on the liquor question. Preachers frequently employed the gospel of prohibition in their services—prohibition became the message. One heavily attended revival in Fort Worth on the eve of the 1910 primary election vilified the liquor traffic and appealed for “prohibition and purity.” Replacing traditional hymns with “Take the Stars and Stripes from the Saloon,” the revival claimed a number of converts, not from preaching Christ crucified but by promoting prohibition.⁴² The

³⁸ *Baptist Standard*, February 23, 1911.

³⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, February 2, 1912.

⁴⁰ *North Texas Conference Minutes*, 1909.

⁴¹ J. B. Cranfill, *Dr. J. B. Cranfill’s Chronicle: A Story of Life in Texas* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916), 489.

⁴² *Dallas Morning News*, May 9, 1910.

boundaries between the two had faded and, in the minds of religious leaders, they were synonymous. “If I find a Christian preacher, I find an anti-saloon man,” J. H. Gambrell remarked. “I never saw otherwise. I hear there are a few. I don’t care to meet them or to cultivate acquaintances.”⁴³ The culture of clericalism demanded constant striving. Prohibitionists had conquered tradition and could no longer tolerate an introverted, cautious brand of Christianity. Through a determined program of zealous commitment and constant agitation, they recreated the clergy’s role in society and committed themselves to prohibition.

The cry for politics arose throughout the churches. Preachers prodded their congregations to vote their religion. Reverend Edwin C. Boynton of the North Dallas Christian Church delivered a typical sermon. “There are those who tell us that religion has no rights in politics,” Boynton preached, “that for it to seek any is to create a union of Church and State.” But Boynton, even in the Christian Church, rejected the spiritual version of his faith. He rejected anticlericalism as a relic. “This arises out of the old conception that religion is question of theology,” he said, but religion “is a question of life, and in whatever way or sphere a man lives, if he is a Christian, he must live as God wills.” His message was clear: a Christian must vote as he prays. The targets were clear. In the coming prohibition election, he urged his congregation to vote “as only an enlightened Christian can, for the chance to destroy the liquor traffic as a stepping stone to the final solution of the liquor question.”⁴⁴

With uncompromising fortitude, legions of clergymen and laypeople undertook the prohibition crusade. Although time has rendered their battle quaint, foresight alone

⁴³ *Dallas Morning News*, May 13, 1910.

⁴⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, July 18, 1910.

should not diminish the apocalyptic urgency of its warriors. When the clerical culture matured, an army of evangelical Protestants stood primed to overthrow the old political order. In 1910 clerics finally overwhelmed the traditional wall separating the clergy and the churches from state politics. Prohibition paved the way, and into this breach sallied forth an army of religious activists. The clerical insurgency reached its full potency. Its flagship issue, prohibition, dominated the landscape. Decades of organization and agitation culminated in the campaigns of 1910. Suddenly, in public life, the clergy were everywhere. Their rhetoric, their concerns, and, most of all, their single dominant issue, prohibition: they washed over the state.

Consensus reigned where once critics lurked. Internal opposition was simply squashed. In 1910 the Texas Christian Missionary Society invited prohibitionist gubernatorial candidate Cone Johnson to speak before its convention and adopted a resolution supporting that year's prohibition campaign. Appalled that a politician should address a religious meeting, a small number of dissenters offered an addendum that stated: "We are unalterably opposed to this convention, of our brotherhood as a body, participating in any way in personal or in partisan politics." It also indicted the convention for allowing Johnson to speak before it: "We deprecate the entanglements and agitation that have arisen on account of the action of the temperance committee placing on the program a man who is asking for a political office." When the addendum went to a vote, only six men supported it; over one-hundred cast their vote in opposition.⁴⁵ Politics and religion were entwined.

The 1910 gubernatorial election was the first statewide election that prohibition fully dominated, and, therefore, the first in which religious activism became a political

⁴⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, May 13, 1910.

issue. Voters decided the prohibition issue that year in two ways: first, by voting for gubernatorial candidates that divided mostly on prohibition; and, second, by deciding whether to submit a state constitutional prohibition amendment to a statewide vote. The Texas state constitution precluded passage of statewide prohibition without a constitutional amendment. The process for passing such an amendment was arduous, but prohibitionists successfully convinced the state's Democratic executive committee to include the question of whether to submit the amendment to a statewide vote in the 1910 Democratic primary. If the "submission" measure passed, the amendment would be decided by a statewide referendum the following year, in 1911.

Prohibition, therefore, utterly dominated state politics in 1910. It confined all competing issues to the periphery. In the months before that year's primaries, the *Dallas Morning News* conceded "there is no use disguising the fact that prohibition is the paramount issue and will decide the election."⁴⁶ Surveying the 1910 gubernatorial election, a member of the State Board of Medical Examiners, R. O. Braswell, observed that "all issues are eliminated from the race at present except statewide prohibition." While lamenting that the issue had even entered the race, he realized that "it has and will be the deciding principle. The people are lining up on these issues and ignoring all other issues."⁴⁷

Political candidates aligned on either side of the issue. Religious leaders managed to run Cone Johnson, a lawyer, politician, and sometime Methodist lay preacher, for governor. Described as "a zealous and devout Christian," Johnson was a powerful candidate in a race that many clergy declared was "the spirit of God manifest in the

⁴⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, May 15, 1910.

⁴⁷ R. O. Braswell to Colquitt, April 26, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

conduct of men and the church of Jesus Christ in action against the liquor traffic.” His program was clear; his targeted constituency obvious. “The foremost question in the minds of all the world today,” he asserted, was “what are we going to do with the manufacture and sale of whisky?” As the champion of religious reformers, Johnson became instantly relevant. As the adversary of political Christianity, so too did his opponent, Oscar Colquitt. “If I cannot choose the weapons with which I must fight,” Colquitt argued, “I will have to accept those tendered me.” A longtime politician and former State Railroad Commissioner, Colquitt confronted the prohibition issue head on with blistering indictments of prohibition and “political preachers.” Johnson had the insurgents; Colquitt had tradition. For now, tradition reigned. By exploiting anticlericalism and portraying his candidacy as the last defense against a rising tide of religious fanaticism, Colquitt propelled his campaign to victory.

As prohibition and its ministerial champions dominated public discussion, anticlerical politicians such as Colquitt became rallying points for disaffected Texans. One Methodist wrote to the Colquitt campaign and divulged that he had graduated from Southwestern University, knew prohibitionist Methodist preacher George Rankin personally, opposed the saloons, and subscribed to both the Methodist’s *Texas Christian Advocate* and the Anti-Saloon League’s *Home and State*. He seemed to be the prototypical prohibitionist, but attacks from Dr. Rankin and others moved him to support Colquitt in the primary. “While I am a Methodist in belief,” wrote another, “I hold in supreme contempt a political preacher, be he Methodist or anything else.” Ministers such as Rankin and “fanatical preachers like him” were slowly fueling a backlash among Texans wary of clerical ambition. “I believe,” wrote one Colquitt supporter, “that many

of them have grown so fanatic over the question that they are loosing [sic] sight of true religion and their God, and are following shadows and delusions.”⁴⁸ Clerical religious leaders had successfully overcome most denominational resistance but the larger secular culture still eyed the clerical insurgency warily. In the early twentieth century, anticlerical thought still pervaded Texas culture, and Texas politics.

Colquitt masterfully exploited anticlerical anger. A middling politician with few political convictions, Colquitt was nevertheless a veteran of numerous prohibition elections and boasted a long and contentious history with leading religious leaders. When prohibitionists stormed into state politics, the fully credentialed anticleric stood primed to lead the resistance. In 1910, he did. That year prohibition had become, as one supporter pointed out, “the supreme, paramount issue before the whole people.”⁴⁹ Without qualification, Colquitt called for the support of all those opposed to politicized religion.

Colquitt coalesced anticlerical support early in the campaign. In late 1909 he won accolades for a very public and very contentious dialogue with the prominent Methodist and *Texas Christian Advocate* editor, George Rankin. The exchanges became a sensation. Colquitt used them to draw in supporters. He printed them and used them as campaign material. He mailed them to supporters. He exploited them, because George Rankin embodied the fears of anticlerical Texans. When Rankin took to the state newspapers to belittle a political candidate as a pawn of the liquor interests, a defender of immorality, and a fallen Christian, many recoiled. Rankin charged that Colquitt “would rather be

⁴⁸ C. W. Simpson to Oscar Branch Colquitt, April 23, 1910; A. W. Campbell to R. M. Colquitt, May 4, 1910; G. W. Walthall to Oscar Branch Colquitt, May 2, 1910; S. M. King to O. B. Colquitt, April 28, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

⁴⁹ W. R. Buyauh to Colquitt, May 16, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

Governor than go to heaven.”⁵⁰ Many Texans weren’t used to preachers waging political warfare in the public sphere. Moreover, Rankin was no obscure, low-level preacher. He stood at the heart of Texas Methodism. As editor of the *Advocate*, Rankin towered over all others in shaping Methodist opinion. Many expected he would be elected Bishop. But Rankin was not alone. His actions were sanctioned by his church and by the mirrored actions of a multitude of clerical activists. The Methodist North Texas Conference, of which Rankin was a part, wholeheartedly endorsed not only his crusade against liquor, but also his assaults on Colquitt. “We commend and approve,” read the Conference’s official minutes, “the bold and courageous stand taken in favor of prohibition by Dr. Geo. C. Rankin in the *Texas Advocate*.”⁵¹ All of this aggravated an already anxious public, and Colquitt swooped in to exploit it.⁵²

Colquitt, sensing widespread anticlerical anxiety, struck back. The candidate rallied his supporters with refrains of “the place of a preacher is in the pulpit and not in politics.”⁵³ Audiences carried signs reading “The Old-Time Religion is Good Enough for Me.”⁵⁴ Colquitt attacked Rankin and the prohibitionist preachers, and the people, at least a bloc of them, loved him for it. A Dallas businessman wrote Colquitt that “a preacher turned politician is always dangerous. So don’t be too easy on him on account of ‘The Cloth,’ he is dragging it in the mire.”⁵⁵ One supporter wrote that he had “just read your ‘romp’ on the political preacher” and, “it makes me feel like I just wanted to take you by the hand and give it a hearty shake. In my opinion, you have him up a tree. Just keep him

⁵⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, January 9, 1910.

⁵¹ *North Texas Conference Minutes*, 1909.

⁵² S. M. King to Oscar Branch Colquitt, April 28, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

⁵³ *Dallas Morning News*, July 21, 1910.

⁵⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, July 23, 1910.

⁵⁵ J. T. Trezevant to Oscar Branch Colquitt, January 26, 1910, Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

there.”⁵⁶ Another wrote that he “enjoyed the tilt you had with Rankin and am proud of you—go after them and stay with them.”⁵⁷ Colquitt did. Attacking Christian clergy was winning him an election. “A little Methodist preacher,” one Colquitt organizer wrote, “is making more noise against us than all the balance combined, and I think in the end it will be to our advantage.”⁵⁸ A newspaper editor from Eagle Pass, after reviewing the Rankin exchange, conceded that “Colquitt is all right.” He said simply “I love him for the enemies he has made.”⁵⁹

By exploiting anticlericalism and portraying his candidacy as the last defense against a rising tide of religious fanaticism, Colquitt gained traction. He fixated on his main rival, Cone Johnson, and blasted Johnson’s clerical allies.⁶⁰ Prohibitionists, active and organized and carrying all the momentum, stumbled before widespread anticlerical anxieties. Now a regular evangelical belief, the appearance of politicized religion still scandalized too much of the state. This was not yet the Bible Belt. One man published “A Texan’s Soliloquy,” a paper bemoaning that a political campaign “so interests my Sainted minister, the guardian of my soul, that he forsake his watchtower and join the rabble,

⁵⁶ P. W. Templeton to Oscar Branch Colquitt, January 13, 1910, Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

⁵⁷ D. A. Griffiths to Oscar Branch Colquitt, January 10, 1910, Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

⁵⁸ A. W. Campbell to R. M. Colquitt, May 4, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

⁵⁹ Jos. O. Boehmer, to Oscar Branch Colquitt, February 10, 1910, Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

⁶⁰ Two other candidates, Robert Vance Davidson and William Poindexter, also ran. Poindexter championed a more moderate prohibition message in a less overtly religious campaign. In a tight race for second place, he topped Johnson’s vote total. Davidson, on the other hand, believed he could rise above the prohibition issue. “The future story and greatness of this State,” he declared in May of 1910, “ought not to be made to revolve around a whisky bottle. . . . Reclamation, irrigation, drainage, agriculture, public education, the building of railroads, the penitentiary question, the care of our Confederate Veterans, judicial reform – these are the main questions which candidates for state offices should discuss.” Davidson was too late. A governor, he argued, “should not be selected because he is in favor of prohibition – a worthy belief – nor because he is an anti-prohibitionist – an honorable belief.” By May of 1910, it was abundantly clear that this would in fact be the case: Prohibition would decide the election, whether in the form of support or opposition to the issue or the reformers promulgating it. Davidson failed to gain traction. *Dallas Morning News*, May 29, 1910.

leaving even my soul naked to mine enemies.”⁶¹ Every public attack upon Colquitt seemed to backfire on religious leaders. An insurance agent wrote that “unscrupulous Preachers are bringing a well deserved reproach upon many churches.”⁶² At a stop in Groveton in June, a supporter presented Colquitt with a self-written poem. Among its many anticlerical verses, it read “They [Prohibitionists] profess to be followers of the Christ / And in his loving faith abide, / But if He acted like they do / Well- He ought to have been crucified.”⁶³

When the returns came in, Colquitt stood triumphant—but only barely. But so, too, did the submission measure on a statewide prohibition amendment. The divided result—Colquitt nominated but submission passed—satisfied no one. Although Colquitt profited from anticlericalism, the state teetered between the clerical insurgency and anticlerical tradition.

The defining characteristic of the 1910 campaign had been the infusion of religion into politics. Religion and prohibition melted into one another. Prohibition organizations did not simply utilize or work in concert with the religious establishment: they *were* the religious establishment. Viewing prohibition organizations as anything other than interdenominational interest groups is an error. The Anti-Saloon League of Texas, for instance, was nothing more than an alliance of church leaders. Both the president and vice president were church leaders.⁶⁴ Of its fourteen official male prohibition field organizers, thirteen were ordained ministers.⁶⁵ The League regularly corresponded with

⁶¹ Walter A. Nelson, “A Texan’s Soliloquy: How Must I Vote?” undated manuscript, Martin Crane Papers, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

⁶² L. C. Rummel to Oscar Branch Colquitt, January 24, 1910, Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

⁶³ Untitled Poem, June 14, 1910, Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

⁶⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, May 22, 1910.

⁶⁵ Sterling P. Strong to Elijah L. Shettles, January 1, 1909. Elijah L. Shettles Papers, 1792-1940, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

statewide religious figures. Dr. J. H. Gambrell, brother of the influential editor of the *Baptist Standard*, was the superintendent of the League's Texas chapter. In 1909 he urged Reverend Elijah Shettles, a respected Methodist leader, to write to his state senator and representative to endorse submission in that year's session.⁶⁶ He begged other ministers to preach the prohibition cause and organize the voters in their counties. To Gambrell, the clergy and their evangelical denominations were "the strongest and most powerful religious and moral forces in the State."⁶⁷ Another prohibitionist, Thomas Blanton, surveyed the roster of an earlier ASL meeting and noted approvingly that "with a few exceptions the above are preachers and are the strongest pastors of their respective churches in this State, and you cannot get together a finer body of representative Christian gentlemen than the above named men."⁶⁸ It was these religious authorities who assumed responsibility for the League's Texas chapters and directed it throughout the 1910 campaign.⁶⁹ From top to bottom, religious leaders united to enact prohibition. Local organizations blended leaders from the evangelical denominations. The leaders of the Statewide Prohibitionist Organization of Dallas County, for instance, included preachers from the city's Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches.⁷⁰ Prohibition and religious activism were indistinguishable.

Despite mixed results, a clear shift in public life had taken place. In the 1880s, Texans had humiliated clerical activists. Not only had prohibition been defeated by enormous margins, but the preachers themselves suffered ridicule. Anticlericalism had seemed unassailable. And for a time, it was. But the tight 1910 elections testified to a

⁶⁶ Sterling P. Strong to Elijah L. Shettles, January 1, 1909. Elijah L. Shettles Papers.

⁶⁷ J. B. Gambrell to Elijah L. Shettles, June 21, 1910. Elijah L. Shettles Papers.

⁶⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, May 18, 1910.

⁶⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, May 22, 1910.

⁷⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, January 3, 1910.

new order of things. “A change has taken place,” wrote one anti-prohibitionist in 1910. “Preachers go about making political speeches. . . . Many preachers are on the stump and in many instances have full management and control of political gatherings at which candidates speak. . . . How does this comport with that Democracy which advocated ‘separation of Church and State for the good of each!’”⁷¹ Anticlericalism proved effective in the near-term, but would it last? Was it now only a desperate, rearguard action?

J. H. Gambrell, the editor’s brother, worked as the superintendent of the Texas chapter of the Anti-Saloon League. He reviewed the election a week afterward. The results had been muddled, but he saw only promise. The preachers had mounted the most aggressive campaign in the history of Texas religion. And rather than being “scourged back to the pulpit,” as they had been in the 1880s, they seemed on the verge of triumph. Whatever the results of the recent election, evidence mounted that they could not now “be driven back into the pulpit and have their mouths closed.” Gambrell said, “The man who has any notion that such a program will work does not know Texas preachers.” Submission had passed. In a year, prohibition would reign once more. Gambrell predicted that religious efforts would intensify, and not retreat. “Practically the entire ministry of Texas will meet this challenge with the Spartan courage that belongs to every true minister of Jesus Christ.”⁷² To Gambrell, despite Colquitt’s effectiveness in exploiting anticlerical anger, anticlericalism was decaying. To Gambrell and many others, the elections, though by no means a victory, nevertheless testified that the clerics could persevere. Traditional anticlerical limits had only been rejected by a small majority. With redoubled effort, a new era of political legitimacy loomed for evangelical activists. An

⁷¹ *Dallas Morning News*, July 16, 1910.

⁷² *Dallas Morning News*, May 31, 1910.

emboldened clergy now stood ready to engage unapologetically in the political process, to shake off whatever minimal fetters till tied them to tradition. “Without delay and with no crimination or recrimination, we must get together,” wrote the *Standard*. “We have just begun to get ready to fight.”⁷³

The 1910 elections produced no clear mandate. The combination of Colquitt’s victory and the passage of submission muddled everything. And so clerics refused to concede. Prohibitionists stayed on the war path. Their recent forays had only intensified their resolve, bolstered their conviction, and accelerated their sense of urgency. Passions inflamed in 1910 exploded in 1911. The question of submission had passed and now the state divided once more over prohibition. As expected, the state split into warring camps. The referendum that year witnessed religious leaders’ newfound willingness to challenge cultural constraints, as the anticlerics’ eager resistance continued. All the drama of the previous year returned. Texas once more plunged into religious politics.

“Now,” a Fort Worth Methodist wrote in 1911, “I am exceedingly anxious that every minister will feel that the time for aggressive and united action is at hand.”⁷⁴ He had little reason to worry. On June 8, 1911, Texas prohibitionists formally opened the statewide campaign. A series of rallies convened at the Fair Park Coliseum in Dallas. Perhaps 2,000 men and women attended the initial session. State congressman and prominent prohibitionists attended. Speakers included Thomas Ball, a Methodist, chairman of the state-wide prohibition organization, and future gubernatorial aspirant; Father Patrick J. Murphy, the oft-deployed prohibitionist Catholic priest; and Cone Johnson, Methodist lay preacher and recently defeated gubernatorial candidate. They

⁷³ *Baptist Standard*, July 28, 1910.

⁷⁴ A. W. Walker to Benejah Harvey Carroll, March 20, 1911, Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection, Archives, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

rebuffed a previous meeting of the “anti-State-widers” and demonstrated their newfound militancy. All sought to trample anticlerical taboos. “They [antiprohibitionists] say they are opposed to the union of Church and State,” Cullen Thomas of Dallas said, “So are we, but I would rather see the State the bride of the Church than to see it the consort of the saloon.”⁷⁵

Methodist minister H. A. Bourland delivered the invocation. He situated the prohibition movement in the “interest of humanity,” but, considerately, also prayed for the opposition. The male chorus of the Central Christian church then sang “Satan’s Want Ad,” a hymn that told of dying drunkards and gamblers and the young boys doomed to replace them. The assembly called for an encore, and the chorus happily indulged.⁷⁶

Thomas Ball assured the crowd that they fought for a just cause, that corrupt brewers and businessmen propped up the opposition, and that the antiprohibitionists’ criticisms were unfair. He attacked the antis for “denouncing the minister for participating in the prohibition campaign.” He went to great lengths promising that the prohibitionists were not fanatics. They were, he said, only concerned citizens. They adhered to proper legal procedure. But disclaimers aside, he promised the audience that they fought for righteousness, for morality, and for all the good things men and women should fight for. He assured his listeners that, as chairman of the prohibition committee, he would rally all Texans “who refuse to bow the knee to Baal in the struggle now on for the redemption of Texas.”⁷⁷ Ball called prohibition a proven “benediction to the people wherever it has been tried.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, June 9, 1911.

⁷⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, June 9, 1911.

⁷⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, June 9, 1911.

⁷⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, June 9, 1911.

After rebutting the antis at such great lengths, Ball repeated the rote facts and statistics of prohibition then proffered by sympathetic doctors and economists.⁷⁹

Furthermore, Ball lectured Governor Colquitt, a Methodist, on the Methodist discipline, the denomination's statements of doctrine and belief. Colquitt traveled the state claiming that many in the pulpits knew too much about politics and not enough about religion, and that, as a Methodist, he should not be slandered for opposing prohibition. Ball happily lectured Colquitt on the Methodist discipline. Ball asked Colquitt to look around at the many Christian preachers and laymen in attendance and to see where the Methodist church stood.⁸⁰

Cone Johnson, the previous year's defeated gubernatorial candidate, called for renewed action. He decried "the doctrine of fatalism," calling it a "doctrine unworthy of a man living in this enlightened age. It will not stand at the bar of enlightened citizenship and will crumble away at the bar of God." He compared Tyler, in dry Smith County, to Dallas, in wet Dallas County. He recalled a host of differences, but he explicitly connected righteousness with political action. He said "The people of Smith County have backed up the work of her churches and ministry with their ballots."⁸¹ The population of Dallas County had not.

Others worked on the crowd. The prohibitionist priest, Patrick Murphy, called for the assembly to help the churches—all the Christian churches, Catholic and Protestant—oppose wickedness by embracing "the clearly written laws of God Almighty." Meanwhile, organizers enlisted activists. Baptist leader J. B. Gambrell organized the

⁷⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, June 9, 1911.

⁸⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, June 9, 1911.

⁸¹ *Dallas Morning News*, June 9, 1911.

distribution of subscription cards for donations.⁸² Activists departed the convention with renewed commitment; the churches had launched their offensive.

The state's two largest Protestant publications, *The Baptist Standard* and *The Texas Christian Advocate*, became veritable prohibition papers. They redoubled their efforts and barraged their readers with their anti-liquor arguments. Their editors called for Texas churches to temporarily release their pastors to spread the gospel of prohibition. "Every pulpit in Texas," the *Baptist Standard* read, "should blaze with moral indignation against the unholy and shameful union of saloon and state."⁸³ With renewed fervor, religious leaders carried the rhetoric and tactics of the previous campaign into this new prohibition fight. Ministers traveled the state preaching prohibition and delivered Sunday sermons challenging the liquor interests.

Tensions mounted across the state. A bodyguard of detectives accompanied Governor Colquitt as he campaigned against the amendment. "The authorities believe that there are cranks on either side," the *New York Times* reported, "who would not hesitate to take human life in the name of the cause they advocate."⁸⁴

The activism of religious leaders, expressed not in anonymous death threats but in unrestrained public agitation, evinced a clear renunciation of historical barriers. Campaigning clergy had transcended all lingering restraints. On July 15, 1911, the state and national press reported that Methodist Bishop Edwin Mouzon "practically read the Governor out of the Methodist Church in an address last night."⁸⁵ "The Governor of Texas so closely identified himself with the liquor interests, while at the same time

⁸² *Dallas Morning News*, June 9, 1911.

⁸³ *Baptist Standard*, May 18, 1911.

⁸⁴ *New York Times*, June 4, 1911.

⁸⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, July 15, 1911; *New York Times*, July 15, 1911.

professing and proclaiming himself to be a consistent member of the Methodist Church,” Mouzon later recalled, “that I felt it my duty publicly to make known the inconsistency of his position.”⁸⁶ Colquitt countered by claiming “I certainly shall not concede that my pastor or members of the Methodist Church have any right to control my conviction on political questions.” He slammed the activists: “I deny the right of preachers to take the Methodist Church into politics.”⁸⁷ But it was too late. They already had. The clerics were neck-deep in public life. The question became, could they stay there?

On June 5, 1911, the antis launched their counteroffensive. They opened their campaign in Fort Worth. Antis swamped the city. Visiting delegates jammed the railroads for the opening convention. Organizers and the railroad companies estimated 18,000 concerned Texans visited the city. The different rail lines added extra coaches to existing trains and ran thirteen “special” trains of ten to fifteen extra coaches each to handle the traffic. The Texas & Pacific ran one such special from El Paso with ten coaches and an estimated 500 passengers.⁸⁸

When they arrived, the antis overtook the city. County delegations paraded through city streets. Bands played. Vendors catered to the affair: Monning’s advertised “Anti Hot” suits of mohair to beat the summer heat, while Overland featured an “Anti Car:” anti-noise, anti-skid, and anti-trouble. Fort Worth became an anti-prohibitionist’s town. On Monday morning, according to reports, as many as 10,000 delegates filled the Fort Worth Coliseum to capacity for the meeting’s opening session. Many had to be

⁸⁶ Edwin D. Mouzon to Clarence Ousley, January 15, 1913, Edwin Mouzon Papers, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

⁸⁷ *New York Times*, May 29, 1911.

⁸⁸ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 5, 1911.

turned away, but inside, speakers excoriated the prohibitionists. The governor received ovations, and a train of speakers castigated political preachers.⁸⁹

Fred S. Dudley of Paris, a prominent attorney and businessman, blasted religious intolerance. He excoriated the “political demagogue and the fanatical bigot.” He admitted his reservations about the role of brewers in politics, but he added “I am also opposed to church domination.” He declared himself “opposed to the church being brought into politics by a class of men who take more interest in a political question than they do in a church question.” He wanted the preachers out of politics: “I do not believe that it is consistent with a Christian spirit to uphold tyranny or encourage oppression.” He deployed all of the usual anticlerical lines. “The church’s kingdom is not of this earth,” he said, adding that the “rights of the citizen must not be sacrificed upon the altar of bigotry.” Dudley breathed the anticlerical culture. He spoke its language. He recalled all of the once-potent images that swept the preachers from public life in decades past. “If we glance through the pages of the world’s history,” he reminded the audience, “we find that some of the greatest atrocities ever conceived by mortal man was born of and encouraged to execution by those claiming to act in God’s name.”⁹⁰ Others joined him.

A notable Houstonian, attorney Jonathan Lane, preached the gospel of “individual liberty” and denounced the prohibitionist preachers. “Would the prohibitionists,” he asked, “nullify and destroy the works of the God they pretend to worship?” It was a rhetorical question, of course. “They do so in the position they take, whether they are aware of it or not.”⁹¹ He upbraided the “wild fanatics” and “enthusiastic zealots who demand prohibition.” He urged the convention to fight back. “Force the designing little

⁸⁹ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 5, 1911.

⁹⁰ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 5, 1911.

⁹¹ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 5, 1911.

fellows and bad men out of your pulpits,” he urged, “and make your churches what they ought to be, i. e., God’s home on earth, where love, peace, tolerance and Christianity and nothing inconsistent therewith are taught.” Prominent Houston attorney and lumber and rail magnate Hiram M. Garwood blasted “a union between church and state, which is thoroughly repugnant to the ideas of this people.” He labeled prohibition an affront to personal liberty, fairness, and property rights, and rebuked it for attempting to “drag the very name of religion and its ministers into the mire of partisan politics.”⁹²

The convention officially resolved that “no governmental question has ever been settled right when complicated by religious sentiments.” Preachers, they said, had no authority outside of their pulpits. “The proper domain for the determination of questions affecting the spiritual welfare of mankind is within the church, and the proper sphere of the solution of temporal affairs is outside the church.” Lane asked the assembly if anyone “has the right to convert the pulpits into political rostrums, or the church buildings into political meeting places on Sundays?”

While vendors busied themselves catering to a “town full of visitors,” city churches blasted the meeting. “Christian people should not lend their presence,” said Rev. J. W. Caldwell of the Taylor Street Presbyterian Church, “and ought to pray that God will bring their councils to naught.” Rev. J.H. Stewart, pastor of Mulkey Memorial Methodist Church, preached from the text “And he pitched his tent toward Sodom.” The Fort Worth Methodist Pastors’ Association met the following day and specifically condemned the governor, a Methodist, for his support of the antiprohibition campaign.⁹³ Such statements, although becoming commonplace, still stoked anticlerical fears.

⁹² *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* June 5, 1911.

⁹³ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 5, 1911

Antiprohibitionists again channeled the state's anticlericalism. "The preacher who talks prohibition from the pulpit," a political pamphlet read, "talks politics in the pulpit."⁹⁴ One anti, Otis Bowyer, chastised prohibition for exciting "so much bitterness." He rejected the old clerical boilerplate: every political question was a moral question, he said. Prohibition was not unique. The issue was liberty, not morality. Texans would reject prohibition, he said, because they still valued religious liberty and "are just as determined in their opposition to ecclesiastical aggression."⁹⁵ Oscar Colquitt remained one of their spokesmen.

During the campaign, Governor Colquitt, as clerics had warned, brought the power of his new office to bear against the proposed amendment and campaigned aggressively against politicized religion. In Cuero (DeWitt County), for instance, large crowds braved the July heat to hear him excoriate the proposed amendment and its clerical supporters. According to the *Dallas News*, "He scored the preacher in politics, and hoped for the time when such preachers would return to preaching true religion and desist from determined efforts to join Church and State."⁹⁶ The speech fed anticlerical Texans hungry for attacks on political preachers. It sparked a firestorm. Newspapers and politicians across the state pleaded for copies.

It was these types of aggressive action that brought Colquitt and the state's Methodist establishment into open conflict. Bishop Edwin Mouzon acted to remove the governor from membership because of such incendiary rhetoric. And he was not alone. In May, Colquitt's local church requested that the governor resign from the Methodist

⁹⁴ Anti-state-wide Prohibition Organization of Texas, *State-wide Prohibition by Questions and Answers* (San Antonio: Anti-state-wide Prohibition Organization of Texas, 1911).

⁹⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, May 21, 1911.

⁹⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, July 5, 1911.

Church. Mouzon redoubled his attacks. A week before the election, Mouzon again repudiated the Governor's Methodism. He asserted that Colquitt was "professing it with his mouth while denying it with his deeds."⁹⁷ Mouzon's controversial attacks stirred tensions in an already tense race. More than 5,000 people were reported to have waited outside Beethoven Hall in San Antonio, where Colquitt was scheduled to speak the following day, to hear his response. Representative F. F. Hill of Denton County addressed Mouzon and the Methodist Church, declaring that he "had always been under the impression it was a church of Christianity," and that "those who desired to read him [Colquitt] out of the church desired the State to have more religion than the church."⁹⁸ These events pushed the limits of even the most ardent prohibitionists.

Anticlerical Texans were already wary of the churches' propensity for purging antoprohibitionists. Mouzon and the Methodists' movement against Colquitt rekindled old fears. During the 1910 campaign, one Colquitt supporter wrote to the candidate and told of his expulsion from the ministry. The author, Baptist S. R. Carruth of Memphis, Texas, described how, "more than twelve years ago, I quit my law practice and went to preaching continuing this work until less than two years ago, the church of which I was pastor desiring that our pulpit be partly devoted to the cause of prohibition asked me to resign." He began a small religious paper to maintain his preaching, but the paper never took off.⁹⁹ The prohibitionists had purged their churches of many dissenters. It was an oft-told tale. In the 1911 campaign, critics frequently cited this as evidence of the clerics' fanaticism. Attorney and businessman Fred Dudley, for instance, slammed the purges. "If an opponent of statewide prohibition does not belong to the church he is classed as a

⁹⁷ *New York Times*, May 29, July 15, 1911.

⁹⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, July 15, 1911.

⁹⁹ S. R. Carruth to Oscar Branch Colquitt, January 17, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

saloonist, as a vile enemy to society and the homes. If he happens to belong to the church, and speaks out against the prohibition idea in many instances he is thrown out of the church and his hat thrown after him. Prohibition in the eyes of the fanatic makes a man holy, qualifies him for office and guarantees future salvation.” He recalled one such instance: “An aged minister of the gospel who dared to voice his honest opposition to the principle of prohibition,” he said, “was silenced from preaching and expelled from the church. I can almost see him now,” he recalled, “stripped of his right to preach the word of the lowly Jesus, crippled, decrepit, cast beyond the pale of the church, defenseless and alone. A victim of bigotry.” Houston attorney Jonathan Lane told of a Baptist church in Burleson County that expelled a Mr. Murrar, “not because he was a drunkard, not because he was not a Christian, but because he is chairman of the organization which is endeavoring to defeat the adoption of the proposed amendment: that they demanded of him that he either get out of the church or cease to exercise his God-given right to vote and act as he pleases in a political matter, and when he declined to surrender his personal convictions he was expelled from the church.”¹⁰⁰

Throughout the campaign, antis raised the cry of “extremism” to sink their rivals. At the Fort Worth meeting, Lane chastised religious leaders as “political preachers,” “itinerant loafers,” and “those fanatical people.”¹⁰¹ Later that summer, Governor Colquitt dismissed the entire movement as a “frenzied fanaticism.”¹⁰² Although the clerics’ sustained activism slowly drained their actions of novelty, calls to staunch religious extremism still appealed to voters. A real estate agent from Nacogdoches, for instance,

¹⁰⁰ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 5, 1911.

¹⁰¹ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 5, 1911; *Dallas Morning News*, June 5, 1911.

¹⁰² *Dallas Morning News*, July 14, 1911.

saw a “danger in the future growing out of the intolerance of the leaders on the prohibition side.”¹⁰³

On the eve of the 1911 election, dozens of prominent Texans, including leading businessmen such as George Littlefield and John Kirby, published an open letter condemning the rigid social vision wrought by moral reformers. They lamented the best-and-the-rest distinctions peddled by the prohibitionists. “The proscription of the sale of intoxicants is but an incidental part of their purpose in the contest,” they wrote. They claimed the liquor question “has passed beyond the mere prohibition question” into a clash of civilizations, that it was dividing the population with the “weapon of religious terrorism, ostracism and outlawry.”¹⁰⁴ Churches had purged dissidents. “The ban of the religious outcast has been put on humble and devoted citizens who dare to own an honest conviction.” Voters must therefore “decide whether a tyranny of opinion shall be established in this State.” A vote against prohibition, they said, was a vote against oppression and fanaticism.¹⁰⁵ By the time the July 22 election arrived, the election had become as much a referendum on the proper role of the clergy as it had on liquor.

And, as in 1910, the antiprohibitionists rallied just enough frightened Texans to their cause to defeat the moral reformers. When the returns came in, statewide prohibition had been defeated for a second time. But, again, the referendum lost by the narrowest of margins.¹⁰⁶ Pros again cried corruption. They blamed voter fraud and the manipulation of African-American and Hispanic voters. They charged the antis with financial impropriety. They vowed to press on. They would not retreat.

¹⁰³ S. M. King to O. B. Colquitt, April 28, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

¹⁰⁴ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 17, 1911.

¹⁰⁵ *The Victoria Advocate*, July 18, 1911; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 17.

¹⁰⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, July 25, 1911.

In January 1912 Methodist Bishop Edwin Mouzon knew that “the call to an aggressive campaign is now ringing through the church” and exhorted his readers to take up the crusade once more: “Let the battle be pressed all along the line!”¹⁰⁷ That year saw new campaigns. Prohibitionists broke with Democratic tradition and challenged Colquitt for reelection by nominating a Texas Supreme Court Justice, William Ramsey, to run in the Democratic primary. Prohibition was the only issue separating the two candidates. Although Ramsey mounted a serious challenge, the power of incumbency proved insurmountable.¹⁰⁸ Pros had launched another campaign and failed to unseat Colquitt. They again collapsed before their opponents’ anticlerical onslaughts. But throughout the campaign, the politics of prohibition continued to buffet Colquitt’s position within the Methodist church. Governor Colquitt had been a member of Austin’s First Methodist Church and held the support of its pastor, Dr. W. D. Bradfield. There, Colquitt had weathered Mouzon’s onslaught and maintained membership in the Methodist Church. But the heated 1912 campaign forced the issue, and one Sunday Bradfield formally broke with the governor. Bradfield renounced Colquitt and forced him to resign. The church’s board of trustees granted his release and reissued his letter. The governor was now churchless. Many speculated on his next move. Some thought he would transfer to University Methodist. But he would find no refuge there. The Methodist hierarchy had purged its apolitical pastor, D. E. Hawk, and the new minister, “Fighting Bob” Shuler, carried the torch of militant clericalism.¹⁰⁹ Colquitt searched in vain for an apolitical church. By 1912, it could seem as though there were none.

¹⁰⁷ *Texas Christian Advocate*, January 11, 1912.

¹⁰⁸ Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 89-91.

¹⁰⁹ *Temple Daily Telegram*, October 31, 1912. Shuler would later solidify his position as a leading belligerent while tending his Southern California, fundamentalist fiefdom.

Again and again prohibitionists struggled to capture state politics, and again and again they were narrowly defeated. But their relentless crusades continued. Although anticlerics continued to score victories, their resistance lacked the sustained stopping power of previous generations. They could no longer cripple their opposition. The clerics kept coming.

CHAPTER NINE

Anything That Ought to be Done: The Triumph of Clericalism

Battered but intact, the clerical crusade continued. The strength of the denominational bases accelerated the culture of clericalism and steeled it against its anticlerical critics. Activists radiated their new clerical vision. It seeped from the churches and into the public culture. Clerics had carried the battle into politics and there they continued to fight. In 1914 reformers once again put prohibition on the ballot and once again ran a prohibition candidate to conquer state politics. And for the final time, anticlerics beat back their clerical opponents. But the seeds of inevitable triumph had been sown. The clerical culture inoculated its defenders against defeat. Despite statewide failure, they maneuvered locally, disseminated their alluring cultural vision, associated their cause with Americanism, and, in the patriotic aura of World War I, reaped the clerical victory.

In a 1914 editorial, *Baptist Standard* editor James B. Gambrell spoke for all of Texas's prominent religious leaders when he declared that "a preacher who doesn't stand in his personality, in his thinking, and in his activities for humanity against all the debasing and corrupting influence of barrooms, with allied evils—gambling dens, redlight districts, and such like—is a faded out, anemic, and worthless sort of preacher."¹ By that year prohibition had swept across much of the country and had certainly become

¹ *Baptist Standard*, June 4, 1914.

dogma among most evangelical Texans, yet the embrace of moral reform and the shift to an active, politicized religion, still stalled in the anticlerical tumult of Texas politics.

As the state descended further into a decade of prohibition politics and religious controversy, the sting of anticlericalism still struck the moral reformers. Colquitt had led resistance for several years. In 1914 the colorful James “Farmer Jim” Ferguson emerged to upset the prevailing pattern. Whereas Colquitt and his allies attacked political religion upon an essentially conservative platform of limited government, Ferguson assumed the anticlerical mantle under the guise of a resurrected Populism. But the final anticlerical offensive exposed the limits of a dying tradition. Fueled by its cultural momentum, sustained by its institutional strength, and furthered by the exigencies of a world war, the culture of clericalism triumphed.

Speaking “exclusively to that coterie of political clergymen who prostitute their high calling,” W. D. Lewis, president of the Texas Farmers Union in 1914, had one request: “return to the pulpit.”² By that year the clerical quest for a moral kingdom verged on triumph: the great wave of moral reform had crested and, though battered, increasingly seemed unstoppable. Historian Richard Hofstadter famously derided the whole lot—prohibition, Sunday laws, and other crusades—as a “rural-evangelical virus.”³ Attacking Hofstadter has long been a tired trope of American historiography, and many scholars of moral reform now focus instead on the leadership of urban reformers and denominational leaders. Nevertheless, rural support remains, lurking in the background, always assumed and typically taken for granted. The voice of the Texas Farmers Union,

² Peter Radford and W. D. Lewis, *Regulating Political Preachers* (Fort Worth: Farmers’ Educational and Co-operative Union, 1914).

³ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 290.

the alluring rhetoric of politicians such as “Farmer Jim” Ferguson, and the anonymous laments of countless others all testify instead to an alternative, to a rural, insurgent brand of anticlericalism. All testify to a repudiation of the moral community that religious reformers fought so hard to construct. These voices imply strict adherence to an agrarian identity and an agrarian politics. Confronted daily by the harsh reality of rural life—poverty, tenancy, uncertainty—many Texans refused to surrender their world and their concerns to crusading masses of clergymen. In their resistance they embraced an agrarian community yoked to agrarian concerns. The final stage of anticlerical resistance rested upon that number of rural Texans who would *not* tie themselves, or be tied, to the budding world of religious reform.

As the case of Texas suggests, and as a whole genre of historical and social scientific research is busy revealing, religion, at least in the United States, has survived, and even thrived, in the shadow of modernity. The growth of industry, urbanization, and bureaucratic life, perhaps to the surprise of both defenders and critics, did not lay waste to American religion. They did not wither the churches. They did not secularize the American people. In fact, in all too many instances, the transformations of the twentieth century proceeded apace with faith, and at times facilitated its expansion.⁴ The American South was no different.

In the New South era, that much-exaggerated but still very real period of rapid regional change after the Civil War and Reconstruction, religion blossomed. “Churches proliferated,” Edward Ayers wrote, and “established a presence in private and public life

⁴ See especially Roger Finke and Rodney Stark. *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999); and R. Stephen Warner, *A Church of Our Own: Disestablishment and Diversity in American Religion* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

they had never known before.”⁵ Church membership outpaced population gains in nearly every state, including Texas.⁶ But the era’s religious growth transcended mere numbers. On the backs of a new class of ministerial leadership, religious authority expanded into areas of public life it had never before known.

But if religion flourished in the New South, it did not do so evenly. Urban areas claimed a disproportionate share of church construction and membership growth. Whatever the boasts of rural preachers, or the lamentations of urban pastors, New South cities bred religious vitality.⁷ Their condensed, sedentary populations found churches, and a vast new church bureaucracy, readily available. Newly popular denominational newspapers published out of the cities. Newly expanding denominational colleges educated in the cities. Grand new churches, larger and richer than any before, arose in the cities. Texas typified these trends. Baylor University, the largest denominational college in the world, trained Baptist youth in the emerging city of Waco. Both the *Baptist Standard* and the Methodist *Texas Christian Standard* published out of Dallas to reach the largest bodies of religious Texans. J. Frank Norris’s First Baptist Church in Ft. Worth grew to become one of the largest congregations in the United States. Such great pulpits bestowed new authority. The preachers in the city “first churches,” men like Norris and The First Baptist Church of Waco’s Benajah Harvey Carroll, found their sermons widely disseminated and their political opinions widely quoted. New South churches were on the

⁵ Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), ix-x. See also Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁶ Samuel S. Hill, *Religion and the Solid South* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1972), 37; Ayers, 499.

⁷ Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 162; Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 199.

move, and, as the nineteenth century closed, a new caste of professional religious leaders appeared.

Under “the allure of respectability,” and in line with the professionalizing tenor of the times, an ambitious cadre of southern ministers won coveted new appointments: permanent stations in wealthy urban congregations. These men traveled no circuits, practiced no other trade, and suffered no financial hardship. Beth Schweiger reveals that urban preachers often earned twenty times more than their rural brothers. They lived in large parsonages, ministered in imposing churches, and isolated themselves from rural life.⁸

Rural pastors did not stand blindly by. Far from the New South’s booming cities, country preachers struggled with inadequate salaries, ambivalent congregants, and limited political influence. They felt alienated from the university-educated professionals preaching in ostentatious city churches, or what Beth Schweiger termed the new “ministerial aristocracy.”⁹ The urban boom bred rural resentment. Some rural religious leaders strove to emulate the power and respectability of city churches, but many did not. Some retreated into a self-conscious spirituality, freed from the affectations of urban wealth and social sway. Specific sects, such as Anti-Missionary Baptists, rejected the worldly incursions of their more influential cousins. Most, however, retained their focus on a personal faith and clung to some form of democratic organization that deemphasized distant denominational leadership.¹⁰ This distance from upwardly mobile, politicized moral reformers prevented a strong tie between rural congregants and urban clerics. This

⁸ Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 130-133.

⁹ Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 130.

¹⁰ Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 7.

chasm, as William Link has written, strained the larger progressive movement in the South and, in Texas, portended a break between moral and agrarian reformers.

In some aspects, agrarian faith challenged outright the religious vision of moral reformers. Populist leaders had an ambivalent relationship to prohibition and the religious establishment. Populist leader Ebenezer Dohoney, an unorthodox believer, endorsed the prohibition cause and incorporated it into his stable of reforms. Dohoney, in fact, authored the local-option clause of the state during the 1875 constitutional convention. Later, in the 1880s, he hosted Frances Willard, president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, in Paris, Texas. Dohoney's wife was a prominent member of the organization. He pushed the Greenbackers to endorse the cause, toured the state in support of the 1887 amendment, and pushed the issue among Populists.¹¹ Among the more mainstream believers in the Populist movement, James "Cyclone" Davis most prominently aligned his Populist support with prohibition and mainstream Protestant principles. He sought the restoration of faith, a "people's faith," that fused morality and Christianity and a sensible political platform that served the people.¹² But many of the agrarian rebels rejected the brewing clerical consensus. Many nineteenth-century southerners saw the dominant denominations align with Bourbons, and, as Walter Buenger discovered in northeast Texas, areas of opposition to prohibition in 1887 generally aligned with Populist support in 1894.¹³ Many agrarians rebelled against the dominant southern churches. Historian Charles Postel uncovered the heterodox religious

¹¹ Walter L. Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2001), 7.

¹² Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South*, 14.

¹³ "Baptist spokesmen, for the most part, expressed attitudes that were more Bourbon than Populist." Eighmy, 43; Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South*, 9.

beliefs of American Populists—especially in Texas—during the late-nineteenth century.¹⁴

More often, though, rural faith waged no open war against the urban vision. It opted instead for a sluggish resistance. But passivity was enough: ambivalence set agrarian Texans apart from the moral crusaders.

In fact, turn-of-the-century rural faith struggled simply to remain viable. In the shadow of the growing cities, rural religion languished. Many rural churches lacked the spark of clericalism. As sociologist Dean M. Kelley wrote in the 1970s, “What costs nothing accomplishes nothing”: many rural churches had not yet discovered the clerics’ ability to cast themselves against their culture, to thrive on their own anxieties and insecurities.¹⁵ They had not learned to be embattled. And so, at the close of the twentieth century, as net membership was growing, less than 30 percent of rural Texans belonged to an organized church. One minister sourly complained that it would take an ascending balloon to get rural Texans to look upward to heaven.¹⁶ While urban churches thrived, rural church buildings decayed and rural pulpits remained unfilled.

Some religious Texans recognized their rural problem. While Texas Methodists were sending missionaries across the world, one country preacher suggested that religious leaders must face the question: “Have we a Country Problem?”¹⁷ Few, however, followed his suggestion.

The new denominational titans, the professionalized leaders ensconced in prominent pulpits and universities and newspapers, often lived up to critics’ charges of

¹⁴ Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 243.

¹⁵ Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 53.

¹⁶ Quoted in Keith Lynn King, “Religious Dimensions of the Agrarian Protest in Texas” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1973), 110-111.

¹⁷ Jesse Lee to Elijah L. Shettles, January 19, 1909. Elijah L. Shettles Papers, 1792-1940, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

detachment. Aloof from agrarian life, they reveled in bland pronouncements and romanticized rhetoric. The farm was pure, they argued; it was a fortress of intense religiosity and impenetrable virtue. One Texas Baptist praised rural churches as “nurseries of pure religion,” as a shield against the “vanity, liquor, gambling, Socialism, Sabbath desecration, infidelity and cesspools of shame of the cities.”¹⁸ “A boy on the farm,” Baylor University President Samuel Brooks said, “has God for a partner in some respects seemingly more vital than the boy in the city.”¹⁹ “People have not got the circus out there,” J. B. Gambrell wrote. He called it a “blessed thing they have not the theater there and they have not the circus there, and they have not the bar-room there and the gambling hall; they have not a hundred things that they have in the city. They are immune out there.” Gambrell and his ilk loved the rural ideal and wanted to immunize the world by remaking it in their imagined country image.²⁰ Such idealizations by religious leaders like Brooks, often university-educated and typically longtime city dwellers, too easily exposed their distance from the realities of rural life. During the very time when independent farming collapsed, Brooks celebrated what he saw as Texans’ universal affluence and boasted that “there is almost no abject poverty in the whole commonwealth.”²¹ Unfortunately, the spiritual and economic oasis gleefully imagined in many pulpits proved illusory. Equipped with such blind assertions, religious denominations ignored a mounting agrarian crisis. As the rural world died, they fought for moral reform.

¹⁸ *Baptist Standard*, June 8, 1893, quoted in Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 79-80.

¹⁹ “To the Boys on Southern Farms,” undated address, Samuel Palmer Brooks Papers, The Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

²⁰ J. B. Gambrell, “Evangelization of the Rural Districts,” in The Baptist World Alliance, *Second Congress, Philadelphia, June 19-25, 1911: Record of Proceedings* (Philadelphia, Pa., Harper & Brother Company, for the Philadelphia Committee, 1911), 203-207.

²¹ “Texas Citizenry,” undated address, Samuel Palmer Brooks Papers, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

At the turn of the century, such crusades captured the passions of ambitious religious leaders. For decades a devoted core of religious reformers dedicated themselves to the eradication of liquor and saloons, of prostitution, Sabbath breaking, gambling, and all other associated vices. The moral reformer waged war on all such sins. They injected notions of morality into public life. Historian Ted Ownby called these efforts “the most important effort to enforce evangelical values in the South.”²² Like their brethren across the South and much of the country, Texas ministers, with their powerful leaders at the fore, took up arms in defense of evangelical morality. They joined the clerical crusade.

The moral reformers blinded themselves to all else. They were unaware, sometimes willfully and even callously, to the collapse of independent farming. The agrarian crisis began decades earlier but accelerated into the twentieth century with alarming speed. The tragic developments that provoked the Populist insurgency decades before had not died with the Farmers’ Alliance or the People’s Party. They festered. Farmers still constituted the vast majority of the population and, trapped by the cotton economy’s ever-deepening cycles of poverty and debt, more descended into tenancy every year.²³ In 1910, one-half of Texas farmers, about 200,000 people, owned no land. Many more teetered on the brink, one poor crop away from crippling debt and a dismal cycle of poverty and political hopelessness.²⁴ Channeling these long-standing yet steadily increasing insecurities, and harnessing the lingering power of Populism’s diffused energy, the Texas Farmers and Educational Co-Operation Union (The Farmers Union) was founded in 1902 to organize cotton cooperatives and gain political clout for

²² Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 170.

²³ Lewis L. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 127.

²⁴ Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 127.

beleaguered farmers. By 1908 the Union claimed more than 100,000 Texans and a quarter-of-a-million southerners as members.²⁵ When these members spearheaded a fiery agrarian resurgence that captured state politics in 1914, moral reformers were caught off guard.

In 1914, at the height of the prohibition agitation, the Farmers Union mobilized to cripple the mania for moral reform. The organization's president, W. D. Lewis, and his predecessor, Peter Radford, barnstormed the state to make their case. "The introduction of a liquor bill invariably has swept the calendar of all other measures, however meritorious, and has thrown the legislature into a seething mass of dissension," they argued, and, no matter the results, "when the battle for supremacy is over, the price of cotton will not be increased 1 cent, the rate of interest on our debts will not be reduced a penny and it will be no easier for a farmer to buy clothes for his family, to educate his children or to obtain a home."²⁶

Prohibition confined competing issues to the periphery. In 1910 Oscar Colquitt successfully appealed not only to anticlerical Democrats but to all those various groups whose own interests were marginalized by the liquor issue. All of the prohibition agitation, one man critical of the movement wrote, "strikes right and left upon the heads of those who do not think prohibition the supreme, paramount issue, before the whole people, to the dire neglect of every other issues [sic] in the campaign." He denied that prohibition "is a paramount issue in any political contest; it is a moral question and a personal one at that."²⁷ Supporters decried prohibition as a distraction, as an obstruction

²⁵ Connie L. Lester, *Up from the Mudsills of Hell: The Farmers' Alliance, Populism, and Progressive Agriculture in Tennessee, 1870–1915* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

²⁶ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, February 17, 1914.

²⁷ W. R. Buyauh to the Editors of the Home and State, May 16, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

blocking more pertinent concerns from the legislature. A lawyer from Fort Worth, for instance, felt that continued prohibition agitation “should have no place in our developing state.”²⁸ “A whole hemisphere of wind,” one critic declared, “is being wasted.” The debate amounted to nothing more than “a great deal of loud talking and absurd disputes in politics.”²⁹ “I don’t believe,” Colquitt said in his final speech that year, “that the people of Texas ought to be torn asunder, neighbors and friends divided against each other and sections of the State estranged over a question like this.”³⁰

During that year’s campaign, J. D. Payne, a rural Texan from Hall County, lamented having to choose between Colquitt and the Christian ministry. He condemned both for not addressing the plight of poor farmers. Until the churches would agitate against the problems of rural poverty and farm tenancy, he argued, they would not be credible. “If you can’t help him otherwise than saying God bless you, then don’t put your physical body on his burdened back and holler ‘Down with the saloon! Down with whisky!’” To Payne, the choice before him was a no-win situation: “One would be just as reasonable as the other.”³¹ Most, however, expected the political fascination with prohibition to end in 1910. Unfortunately for Payne and the others, a string of ambiguous results left both sides feeling vindicated and aching for further confrontations. The prohibition issue floated on.

While farm tenancy and rural poverty plagued the state, prohibition overshadowed everything. And so, with prohibition and the clerical crusade having dominated public life for several years, in 1914 Lewis and Radford pleaded with political

²⁸ Hames Gilford Browning to Oscar Branch Colquitt, April 23, 1910. Oscar Branch Colquitt Papers.

²⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, May 14, 1910.

³⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, July 23, 1910.

³¹ *Dallas Morning News*, April 8, 1910.

leaders to go “back to the soil with legislation.” Frustrated that unceasing prohibition agitation precluded an agrarian political agenda, they urged voters to shun the moral crusaders and vote instead for those politicians “who are in genuine sympathy with their needs and understand their problems.” Moral reform was an impediment, they argued: it had to be suppressed. And so Radford and Lewis, in pursuit of a political program of “an improved market system, cheap money, rural credits, organization, co-operation and proper facilities for preparing, storing and transporting products to the market,” set about undermining moral reform and the religious leaders who championed it.

Radford and Lewis savaged political preachers. They praised “that large body of consecrated ministers who refuse to be lured from the pulpit,” but laid into the crusaders: “It is well for the friends of religion to pause and consider the distance we have traveled toward a union of church and state.” The current antiliquor crusades, they said, deviated from a long and noble anticlerical tradition beginning with Christ’s outburst at the temple and carrying through to the Texas Revolution and the state constitutions forbidding preachers from political office. But “the difficulty of keeping the preacher in the pulpit is as old as religion,” they warned.³² They tagged the Salem witch trials and the Spanish Inquisition as logical outgrowths of politicized religion. “When in control of government,” they said, “the pulpit politicians invariably undertake to perform legislative miracles such as casting out witches with the flame of a torch, suborning conscience with shackles and enforcing opinions with the guillotine.”³³ They cautioned their listeners that “we are hurrying toward a crisis.”

³² Peter Radford and W. D. Lewis, *Regulating Political Preachers* (Fort Worth: Farmers’ Educational and Co-operative Union, 1914).

³³ *State Topics*, May 30, 1914; see also Peter Radford and W. D. Lewis, *Down with the Bosses* (Fort Worth: Farmers’ Educational and Cooperative Union, 1914).

Bolstered by funds from Texas brewers, Union leaders spent 1914 attacking prohibition and its clerical boosters. They reminded the public that prohibition had already dominated state elections in 1910 and 1912, led to a statewide referendum in 1911, and that “the past three or four sessions of the Legislature have done little else but wrangle over the liquor question.”³⁴ To move beyond the confines of moral politics, they proposed a simple solution: “political preachers should be regulated.”³⁵ Their suggestion, perhaps less tongue-in-cheek than they would have admitted, called for legal limits on political preaching. “We think a ministerial clause should be written in the present Constitution ... and legislation should also be enacted preserving the sanctity of the pulpit from political vandalism.”³⁶

Although such legal proscriptions never passed, the Farmers Union’s larger strategy worked. Throughout the state, distressed agrarians distilled all the politicking and maneuvering of the period into, at least for a short time, a clear battle between two types of reform: moral and agrarian. Moral reformers never understood the economic desperation behind the resurgence of agrarian politics. “The fact cries to heaven,” Baptist leader Samuel Brooks said in 1916, “that too often rural people beg the government to rid their cattle of ticks, their horses of charbon [anthrax], and their hogs of cholera. They appear ignorant or blind to that fact that in our cities hot-beds of vice win the credible and passionate county boys. City booze joints are worse for country boys than ticks for country cattle.”³⁷ With such myopic insistence on the primacy of prohibition and moral

³⁴ Peter Radford and W. D. Lewis, *Back to the Soil with Legislation* (Fort Worth: Farmers’ Educational and Co-operative Union, 1914).

³⁵ Radford and Lewis, *Regulating Political Preachers*.

³⁶ Radford and Lewis, *Regulating Political Preachers*.

³⁷ “Samuel Palmer Brooks before the Southern Sociological Congress,” speech delivered in New Orleans, Louisiana, April 12, 1916. Samuel Palmer Brooks Papers.

reform, and the continued rejection of agrarian concerns, rural disaffection could be seen as inevitable.

Horace Bishop, a Methodist Presiding Elder, sensed his faith's decaying appeal in the countryside. He knew that the churches' ongoing professionalization and their monomaniacal obsession with city saloons, an obsession he partly shared, offered little tangible aid to struggling farmers desperate for relief. This failure, he feared, alienated many. "Our preachers and churches are entirely out of touch with the renters of land," he said.³⁸

Some clerics struggled to brandish their country bonafides. "Now, there are not many of us but what have been common folks at one time or another," Baptist editor J. B. Cranfill told a crowd at the Waco YMCA. "Now, I was myself," he said to laughter. "You know, we are town folks now, aren't we, but we needn't be stuck up about it. We are just country people moved to town, that is all we are."³⁹ In a state only just embarking on its long path toward urbanization, he was right. And yet, the clerics clung to their identity as the "best sort." Prohibition granted professionalized preachers status and middle-class respectability, and most of the movement's leaders emerged from universities and seminaries. Worse, however, they were often politically neutral, and usually antagonistic to many rural concerns.

Jim Ferguson harnessed this alienation by channeling decades of anger and despair into his 1914 gubernatorial conquest. He captivated the state with his schemes to shield rural Texans from their perceived predators. He castigated large corporations, the

³⁸ Horace Bishop to Elijah L. Shettles, August 10, 1914, Elijah L. Shettles Papers.

³⁹ J. B. Cranfill, "Looking Backward," Lecture delivered by J. B. Cranfill at YMCA Hall, Waco, Texas, April 21, 1893. James Milton Carroll Collection, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

machinations of corporate lawyers, and the avarice of wealthy landholders. “Let government assist those who plead for opportunity,” he said.⁴⁰ He advocated rent caps, rural credit, storage facilities, public warehouses, increased rural school funds, marketing systems, and a public commissioner to publicize up-to-date pricing. Throughout the campaign, “Farmer Jim,” as he and his supporters advertised him, articulated the concerns of anxious farmers and desperate renters. And he won followers. In a matter of months, he emerged from relative obscurity to challenge and defeat the prohibitionist Thomas Ball. Ball had chaired the prohibitionists’ 1911 campaign, but his career as a corporate lawyer put Ferguson’s farmer-friendly platform in stark relief.⁴¹ After the election, Methodist Elder Horace Bishop remarked that “Mr. Ferguson’s campaign was well organized and walking delegates were seeing the renters in shacks and making them believe that F. [Ferguson] was working for them.”⁴² Prone, then and now, to charges of corruption and demagoguery, his supporters nevertheless felt that, as one said, he “must pay this penalty for proposing a measure of relief to the great body of men who produce the wealth of the country.”⁴³

Ferguson’s campaign was a throwback to the agrarian politics of the 1880s and 1890s. He captured the latent energy of the demobilized Populists and, as the *New York Times* aptly noted at the conclusion of the election, “Ferguson polled practically the entire vote of the counties which were strongholds of Populism.”⁴⁴ During the campaign, prohibitionists worried that farmers were “taking to Ferguson’s land proposal like a

⁴⁰ *Corsicana Daily Sun*, May 29, 1914.

⁴¹ For the politics of the 1914 campaign, see especially Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 120-149.

⁴² Horace Bishop to Elijah L. Shettles, August 10, 1914, Elijah L. Shettles Papers.

⁴³ B. Y. Cummings, “The Relation of Landlord and Tenant in Texas,” speech delivered in Itasca, TX, April 25, 1914, Alexander Dienst Collection, 1784-1929, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, August 3, 1914.

hungry cat to a piece of fresh beef liver.”⁴⁵ And why not? He was the first Texas governor in decades to appeal so openly to rural voters. As one backer proclaimed in 1918, “Jim Ferguson is the only Governor Texas ever had that ever attempted to do anything for the masses who earn their bread by the sweat [sic] of their brow.”⁴⁶

Ferguson grounded his campaign for rural uplift in farmers’ frustration with moral reform. The mania for morality, Ferguson claimed, concealed the tragic collapse of independent farming and the debauching realities of farm tenancy and sharecropping. He swore to put an end to all prohibition agitation and, referring to any potential such legislation, promised “I will strike it where the chicken got the axe.”⁴⁷ Ferguson’s campaign represented, in his words, a “clear cut declaration to stop the prohibition agitation.”⁴⁸ Like Colquitt before him, Ferguson rejected the rights of preachers to dictate politics. Echoing Richard Coke’s infamous plea for Texans to “scourge” preachers back to their pulpits, Ferguson said “Let us scourge from the Democratic ranks in Texas those who would destroy our grand old party by raising issues which have no place in a democratic home.”⁴⁹ Ferguson and his allies, according to the prominent Methodist minister Elijah L. Shettles, constituted “a gang who spews on the ministry and the churches in this country the vilest of slanders, and who do not care a continental for anybody’s church.”⁵⁰ He may have been right.

Ferguson attacked his opponent, Thomas Ball, as a shill for corporations and misguided clerics. Ferguson depicted the campaign in simple terms: “on the one side are

⁴⁵ Quoted in Lewis L. Gould, “Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democratic Politics, 1911-1921,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 75 (July 1971), 13.

⁴⁶ W. H. Basden to W. P. Hobby, June 23, 1918, Dienst Collection.

⁴⁷ Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 125.

⁴⁸ *The Corsicana Daily Sun*, May 29, 1914, in Colquitt Papers.

⁴⁹ *The Corsicana Daily Sun*, May 29, 1914, in Colquitt Papers.

⁵⁰ Elijah L. Shettles to Alexander Dienst, July 18, 1914, Elijah L. Shettles Papers.

the farmers, laborers and business men engaged in a struggle against corporate interests and political preachers.” He told one crowd that “some of these political preachers of today have got quite an idea of morality in this country, and quite an idea about both religion and politics.”⁵¹ Rather than run from the Farmers Union’s caustic rhetoric against politicized religion, Ferguson embraced it. He labeled Radford the “the farmer philosopher of Texas,” and his campaign disseminated his and Lewis’s printed pamphlets as campaign material.⁵² Ferguson’s campaign and the Farmers Union’s attacks resonated. One Atascosa County attorney complained to the prohibitionist politician Thomas B. Love that “the Radford-Lewis propaganda—preachers to their pulpits and the prohibition question to the background—has had its effect, in this county at least.”⁵³

Ferguson rode his agrarian, anticlerical platform to victory. John Morris, a prosperous merchant, lamented that “the result shows that the farmers were made to believe it was a fight between corporations and the working class of people. The Farmers Union had poisoned speakers all over the country, firing them with indignation.” The whole affair, he wrote, was a “shame to the state’s religious and moral efforts.”⁵⁴

“We have 220,000 tenant farmers roaming from farm to farm,” the Farmers Union leaders had lectured, and “this seething torrent of unrest must be reckoned with in the coming campaign.”⁵⁵ It was. Weary of the unceasing political conflict against vice, and the inattention to farmers’ issues, many rural Texans turned against moral reform. They maligned its clerical champions and united behind upstart politicians willing to challenge

⁵¹ *Dallas Morning News*, July 17, 1914.

⁵² Q. U. Watson to John G. McKay, June 26, 1914. Alexander Dienst Collection

⁵³ Kevin C. Motl, “Under the Influence: The Texas Business Men’s Association and the Campaign against Reform, 1906-1915” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 109, No. 4 (Apr., 2006), pp. 494-529.

⁵⁴ John S. Morris to Elijah L. Shettles, August 11, 1914, Elijah L. Shettles Papers.

⁵⁵ Radford and Lewis, *Down with the Bosses*.

the imperatives of a politicized religion. “For eight years,” newly elected Lieutenant Governor William P. Hobby said after the election, Texas “has been torn politically by the question of Statewide prohibition. We took the ground that there were other questions worthy of consideration. We asked the people to drop the prohibition question and turn their attention to the material interests of the State.”⁵⁶ By attacking prohibition and its clerical champions, Ferguson and others were able to hand the dries one more defeat. Ferguson won a clear victory, and submission was defeated.

Prohibition stalled. Ferguson’s two-pronged approach of agrarianism and anticlericalism had won the antiprohibitionists another dramatic victory. In 1916, with Ferguson’s reelection, they won another. The future of moral reform perhaps seemed uncertain, but still reformers marched on. In previous cycles, the weight of anticlericalism crushed reform. In the 1880s, critics “scourged” them from public life. All of that had changed. Despite several defeats, the prohibition issue, at the head of a great religious crusade, was too powerful and its supporters too organized and too determined to retreat. The Bible Belt loomed.

Although the crusaders limped through the second decade of the twentieth century, they would nevertheless emerge triumphant. Withering anticlerical attacks had blunted the clerical advance, but only briefly. The anticlerical defense flickered and faded and soon the clerics reigned triumphant.

Throughout all of the bitter partisan battles of the early twentieth century, cloistered denominational worlds buoyed clerical defeats. There, shielded from the stormy winds of politics and the sting of a public’s anticlericalism, unrestrained activists nourished new generations with the gospel of clericalism. In 1914 First Baptist Church of

⁵⁶ *New York Times*, December 20, 1914.

Dallas pastor George Truett held the Lewis Holland Lectureship at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. Although among the most vocal defenders of Baptist tradition and a strict and explicit proponent of the separation of church and state, Truett nevertheless recognized the preacher's new mission. Each of his lectures recounted the power of the pulpit. Each wove together the assumptions of the clerical crusade. Truett urged his listeners, preachers and soon-to-be preachers, to recast their understanding of the power of the pulpit. He urged them to take up the crusade. He urged them to finish constructing the Bible Belt.

In his Southwestern lectures, Truett rejected anticlerical restraints. He rejected the democratic church. "The preacher's throne is the pulpit," he said, "for there he must rule in royal fashion." Preachers should not be slaves to others' consciences, but agents of a new moral awakening. He urged his listeners to resist the confines of the spiritual otherworld. Instead, he said, "See the preacher as the advocate and champion of every worth-while reform, of all true progress everywhere." He reminded his listeners to never forget the importance of soul-saving and of the essential spiritual mission of evangelical religion, but he believed the power of the pulpit was too great to be so narrowly restricted.⁵⁷

"Within the pulpit is the place of the greatest forces in this world, the most strategical forces," Truett said. Unshackled, the preacher could make his mark upon civilization. Indeed, the preacher already had. Truett, like other apostles of the clerical culture, inserted the preacher into the forefront of history. "What a debt our nation owes to preachers!" he said. "What an interesting article that would be for some man to write

⁵⁷ George W. Truett, "The Preacher in the Pulpit," Lewis Holland Lectureship, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ft. Worth, Texas, February 25, 1914. James Milton Carroll Collection.

on: ‘The Debt of the Republic to its Pulpit.’”⁵⁸ American history, he said, depended upon its preachers. Don’t see them as meek and humble shepherds, Truett urged, “See them as patriots, for the true preacher is always the true patriot.” Furnished by their denominations with a potent and mature clerical vision, new generations of activists graduated into the world. There, they gleefully clashed against their anticlerical opponents. There, they learned to weather defeat.

In the 1880s religious activists lacked consensus, resources, and a widespread, motivating culture. By the late-1910s they had all of these. If anticlericalism rested upon sand, upon an unstable foundation, the clerics built their crusade upon the rock of the denomination. The power of the pulpit, the power of the pew, and a vast denominational machinery all supplied energy and momentum. The culture of clericalism turned the logic of anticlericalism on its head. Every “scourging,” every defeat, every public rebuke and anticlerical repudiation: these only intensified the clerics’ sense of a persecuted, embattled clerical identity. Once the clerical coup trampled over the churches and installed their leaders into the lifeblood of the denominational machinery, once they embarked upon the clerical path, there was no turning back. There was no “off” switch. The logic of clericalism worked itself unceasingly.

The large evangelical churches had purged dissidents. The politics of clericalism finally excised the last lingering reluctance of religious leaders to wage religious war. Early in the clerical crusade, many prohibitionists, whether or not they were politically active, hesitated to openly admit to political meddling. Many nuanced the issue: they could follow morality into the public sphere in pursuit of such issues as prohibition, but they were not “political preachers.” In 1910, for instance, even amid its boisterous pleas

⁵⁸ Truett, “The Preacher in the Pulpit,” James Milton Carroll Collection.

for politicized religion, the *Baptist Standard* sought publicly, time and again, to extricate itself from naked political maneuvering. Prohibition, it said, “did not originate with any organization whatever. . . . The whole movement is non-partisan.”⁵⁹ But such self-disclaiming sentiments evaporated in the heat of unrelenting and unending statewide prohibition battles. The same year that the *Standard* still sought a political middle ground, Rev. Edwin Boynton of the North Dallas Christian Church proffered a once-taboo notion of church and state: “In a just and moral government, religion and the State are inseparable.” The sin condemned by churches and the crime condemned by the state shared common roots, he said. “The greatest question before any State,” then, “is the character of its citizens, and for morality every State must provide.”⁶⁰ All doubts about politics disappeared. By 1914 the *Standard* refuted their last trace of doubt and reminded its readers that the burdens of clericalism demanded unrelenting and unapologetic activism⁶¹

And so against the withering attacks of the anticlerical resistance, the clerics stood strong. Their movement intensified. By 1914 moral reform had taken an intractable hold of Texas churches. According to the Bible, one pastor wrote in the *Baptist Standard*, preachers had always been “aggressive agitators.”⁶² Baptist A. B. Ingram wrote that “it is the business of the preacher to fight sin. His commission demands a truceless warfare.”⁶³ J. B. Gambrell agreed: “Preachers that will not lend themselves to the destruction of this

⁵⁹ *Baptist Standard*, June 9, 1910.

⁶⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, July 18, 1910.

⁶¹ *Baptist Standard*, July 9, 1914.

⁶² *Baptist Standard*, July 9, 1914, quoted in Storey, 27.

⁶³ *Baptist Standard*, July 9, 1914.

masterpiece of the devil's work are not doing their duty; they have no right to the respect of their fellow citizens, and what is more, they won't have much of it."⁶⁴

Narrow public defeats masked the distance traveled in recent years. While prohibitionist preachers had embraced a public role for several years, now they shed any and all lingering strands of self-conscious hesitation. "I have no apology to make for the service I have rendered as an advocate of temperance and prohibition," J. B. Cranfill wrote.⁶⁵ "If that makes me a political preacher," Ingram added, "then I gladly accept the title."⁶⁶ Swept up in the crusading spirit, the evangelical establishment of Texas refused to cower to anticlerical expectations. They were resolute and unwavering.

The churches embraced their burden. In 1915 the Baptist General Convention of Texas formally recognized the denomination's social commitments by forming the Social Service Committee. The committee resolved that, "truly speaking, the secular side of life is inseparable from the moral and the religious." Claiming a wide mandate, the body declared it the duty of the righteous "to correct the wrongs of individuals and of all forms and conditions of society, whether they be in political, church, social, amusement, business relations, or whatever or wherever they be found."⁶⁷ The body represented the maturation of the clerical vision.

The clerics had captured the denominations, grown them, and inculcated a new generation with their new clerical culture. The entire clerical machine spun. Churches swelled, denominational colleges blossomed, and the momentum for moral reform

⁶⁴ *Baptist Standard*, June 4, 1914

⁶⁵ J. B. Cranfill, *Dr. J. B. Cranfill's Chronicle: A Story of Life in Texas* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916), 490.

⁶⁶ *Baptist Standard*, July 9, 1914.

⁶⁷ Baptist General Convention of Texas, *Proceedings* (n.p., n.d.), 26-7, quoted in Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership*, 36.

mounted. They captured state and local offices and maneuvered against their anticlerical opponents. “Our Church is rich; our people have vision; our preachers are loyal and heroic,” Texan and Methodist Bishop Edwin Mouzon said in 1913. That year, surveying the culmination of the clerical crusade, he saw the anticlerical past rupturing and decaying. “Now,” Mouzon said, “Let the Whole Line Move Forward.”⁶⁸ Mouzon saw the dawn of the Bible Belt. He recognized the power of religious leaders. He saw that their voice was loud, their power manifest. “We have come to the consciousness of our power,” he wrote, “and we have just discovered what we can do: We can do anything that ought to be done.”⁶⁹

Prohibition consumed the imagination of the clerics. The antiliquor campaign had become a holy crusade to exorcise a corrupt institution and purify a populace. Interdenominational alliances “locked shields” and marshaled in opposition to wage political warfare against moral and spiritual decadence. But as liquor campaigns became referendums on the proper role of the clergy, many Texans lashed back at the ministers of prohibition. And yet, in spite of defeat, the clerics stood strong. Sustained by unity and culture, by history and by organizations, the prohibitionists ultimately triumphed. By the close of the second decade of the twentieth century, their movement readied itself to sweep away the last stale vestiges of the anticlerical vision.

The clerics primed themselves for victory. Even amid defeat, they expected nothing less than ultimate triumph. The fundamentalist prophet and First Baptist pastor J. Frank Norris led many of the clerics’ legislative efforts. Rebuffed in his efforts to secure a daylight saloon-closing bill in the spring of 1911, Norris demonstrated the

⁶⁸ *Texas Christian Advocate*, July 31, 1913.

⁶⁹ *Texas Christian Advocate*, July 31, 1913.

clerics' newfound resolve: they had been rebuffed, "But God is on his throne and right is eternal," he said, "and whatever be the issues of this or any other election, the forces of evil will be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessel and righteousness cover the earth as the waters do the sea."⁷⁰ In contrast to the previous generation's tepid and self-conscious activism, the twentieth-century crusaders would not be scourged back into their pulpits. Nor, even in the face of defeat, were they ready to confine their vision to the borders of the Lone Star State.

"We make a mistake in confining our efforts to save a few individuals, here and there," North Dallas Christian Church Reverend Edwin Boynton preached in 1910, "when our aim should be a nation in a day. When Christian people can quit singing psalms long enough to get good rich blood in their veins and get out into the realities and struggles of life, Christianity will mean something in the world."⁷¹ Clerical ambitions swelled. The Methodist lay preacher and sometime political aspirant, Cone Johnson, beat the drum of a broad and unbounded prohibition movement. "Our fight is against the saloon: we seek its destruction and believe that the time has come and the public opinion is ripe, not only for its destruction, but for the outlawry of the business. This is no short-lived agitation: it is Nation-wide: it is world-wide."⁷² But before they could embark upon a worldwide movement, they faced obstacles at home.

Anticlerical remnants still raged against the insurgents in Texas. Tradition still lashed the preachers. But the anticlerical world was dying and the clerics could weather its death knell. Motivated by their potent cultural vision, rooted in righteousness, and

⁷⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, March 6, 1911

⁷¹ *Dallas Morning News*, July 18, 1910.

⁷² *Dallas Morning News*, October 31, 1909.

sustained by a vast store of resources, the clerics believed in the inevitability of their triumph.

Ferguson's 1916 reelection would mark one of the last triumphs of a decaying anticlericalism. By that year, despite multiple statewide defeats, the prohibition movement had matured into an efficient engine of reform. Whatever occurred at the state level, religious leaders and their progressive allies were winning the ground war. They had captured control of the state legislature and, in January 1913, enthroned the nation's leading moral reformer. Packed galleries in the Texas House greeted thirty-seven year old Morris Sheppard as Texas's newest United States Senator. A committed Methodist and former Epworth League organizer, Sheppard had pushed for prohibition in previous elections, he said, so that "man will rise ... again to be crowned with the confidence and approbation of Almighty God."⁷³ On the day his appointment to the Senate officially began, he delivered a speech outlining a broad Progressive platform. But the loudest ovations accompanied his indictment of alcohol and his promise to "oppose this scourge from hell until my arm can strike no longer and my tongue can speak no more."⁷⁴ The clerics had found their champion. The tide swelled and readied itself to crash. And then the war came.

The First World War capped the clerical crusade. The war's 100-percent-Americanism melded so seamlessly with domestic moral reform that prohibition swept through Texas and submerged the American political system. Time and steady

⁷³ Morris Sheppard, *Congressman Sheppard is for Prohibition* (Fort Worth: Statewide Prohibition Amendment Association Headquarters, 1911), 8.

⁷⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, January 30, 1913; Texas House of Representatives, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Regular Session of the Thirty-third Legislature of Texas* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1913), 224-263.

momentum alone might have won the state—and the nation—for prohibition, but that would never be seen. Instead, the war came and changed everything.

The culture of clericalism depended on mobilizing resources and honing political tactics, but it also relied upon its unique cultural vision. Over the course of several decades, religious activists positioned themselves as the stewards of public righteousness and as the true protectors of a virtuous democratic republic. They associated their cause with Americanism. By using just one example, the clerical understanding of “South Texas,” the bonds connecting religion, political alignment, and patriotism becomes clear.

Although the birth of clericalism was rooted in late-nineteenth-century religious anxieties, more than mere angst drove religious leaders into public life on behalf of such issues as prohibition. Anxiety was only a symptom of a constellation of values and visions propelling the moral crusades, and brightest among that constellation was a social vision, a way of looking at the world that cast society into competing camps of saints and sinners, of pure and impure: of “us” and “them.” Such a worldview drove reformers into political campaigns and invested those campaigns with transcendent meaning. Political battles entangled cultural, racial, and ethnic differences with political disagreement. After decades of political engagement, two intractable, oppositional caricatures emerged in the eyes of the crusaders. Reformers cast their opponents as immoral and debauched, for sure, but they were worse: they were foreign, they were un-American, they were the embodiment of everything a holy citizenry should struggle against. The fighting prohibitionist, then, represented a holy antithesis, a beacon of manhood, of whiteness, of honor, of godliness—of everything that white religious Texans held dear. Such is the

language, and the vision, that religious leaders carried with them in their imaginations of, discussions about, and travels to, “South Texas.”

Moral reformers depended upon a shared identity, a sense of self grounded in a tangled mass of whiteness and evangelical Protestantism—a unity they cast against the all-encompassing foreignness of “South Texas.” As economic expansion and evangelical ambition pushed them ever southward and ever westward, they amalgamated ethnicity and religion into a powerfully animating “imaginative geography”: a sense of permanent geographical division rooted in ethnic and religious differences. “South Texas” became shorthand for cultural exclusion. Conceptions of the region came to defy geography, but for many contemporaries, geography was irrelevant: religion and ethnicity created their own sense of place, their own notions of an alien land ungoverned by morality, Protestant Christianity, and whiteness. By maligning “South Texas” in their political crusades, religious leaders helped demarcate ethnic difference, justified economic displacement, and constrained regional Anglo-Hispanic relations. All the while, clerical activists fostered a monopoly as the guardians of a uniquely American identity.

“I found a striking difference between the people of South and North Texas,” Methodist minister George Rankin reflected in 1912. “So when I entered North Texas it was like coming into contact with another civilization and with the masses of another race of people.”⁷⁵ Years of highly publicized anti-vice campaigns had won him a prestigious appointment at the First Methodist Church of Dallas, but he had not come from Brownsville, or Laredo, or even San Antonio, parts of what scholars usually

⁷⁵ George Rankin, *The Story of My Life: or, More Than Half a Century As I Have Lived It and Seen It Lived*, (Dallas: Smith & Lamar, 1912), 336.

presume to be “South Texas.”⁷⁶ He had come from Houston. Rankin’s geography was nonsense—Houston is closer to Oklahoma than to Mexico—but for the Methodist preacher and many of his contemporaries, geography was irrelevant: perceptions of race and religion created their own sense of region.

Historically, Rankin’s north-south distinction had some merit: in early Texas, when populations clustered in the northeast portion of the state, Houston was indeed the southern edge of Anglo settlement. A quick browse through the yellow pages, and its numerous listings with “South Texas” in the title, quickly confirms that legacy. But by the turn of the twentieth-century such labeling was an anachronism. The state’s population was exploding and had long ago expanded beyond its narrow northeastern confines. Houston as “South Texas” ceased to have much physical relevance, yet in the minds of Rankin and others, something still linked Houston with the border, with San Antonio, and with the German counties of Central Texas.

Geographer David Arreola argues that before the twentieth century, before agriculture displaced ranching, before Mexican immigration intensified, and before whites’ racial views hardened, few identified South Texas as an alien province. Most thought of the area along the Mexican border, for instance, as barren and only sparsely inhabited, if they thought of it at all. South Texas “was not seen as a differentiated region until quite recently,” he writes, and “the association of the region as a Hispanic area is even more recent.” Even today the region’s precise boundaries are unsettled. In his cultural geography, *Tejano South Texas*, Arreola identified the eight most prominent

⁷⁶ For definitions of South Texas, see especially Daniel Arreola, *Tejano South Texas: A Mexican American Cultural Province* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 6, as well as the award-winning studies of Neil Foley and David Montejano. Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 16; and David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 2.

regionalizations of South Texas. All were made in the twentieth century, no two were alike, only one extended into Central Texas German counties, and none included Houston. Still, Arreola's general claim that "South Texas is the southeastern edge of what has been identified as the Hispanic American borderland" is now generally accepted.⁷⁷ But what then of cities such as Houston? For them there had to be a transition, a moment when the label lacked geographic sense but, since it remained in usage, retained some meaning divorced from geography. For most Texans, those meanings were bound up in the racial and religious dynamics of the turn of the century.

The final decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a tragic hardening of racial and ethnic relations in the American South.⁷⁸ Though a large Mexican American population burst any simple black-white dynamic in Texas, the Lone Star State nevertheless followed form. Clerics had already cast most African Americans with the lot of the "worst sort" and set about lumping Mexicans and Mexican Americans into a new bounded cultural space. Rigid racial philosophies soon trampled any traces of flexibility or fluidity, and the tenuous local accommodations that characterized much of the earlier period collapsed. As David Montejano writes in his award-winning *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, by World War I, in the eyes of most Anglos, "a Mexican was simply a Mexican."⁷⁹ This is not to deny a long and sordid history of Anglo prejudice: various scholars have firmly established such a history.⁸⁰ But again, Montejano notes correctly that the history of Anglo-Mexican relations is a combination of history and

⁷⁷ Arreola, *Tejano South Texas*, 6, 21, 2.

⁷⁸ See especially C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁷⁹ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 115.

⁸⁰ See especially Arnolfo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).

contingency, that racial perception is mutable. Elsewhere, Arnolde De Leon writes what should be self-evident: “The Tejano community that Anglos observed was more a product of their attitudes than a correct perception of that society.”⁸¹ But attitudes, and the imperatives of those attitudes, change over time. The rise to prominence of a group of moralizing evangelicals drove one such change and, as a consequence, helped make “South Texas.”

The racial and ethnic premises of most moral reformers were hardly novel. Like others, they began by demarcating between foreign and native. Contemporary Baptist Scholar J. M. Carroll called South Texas “foreign territory” and ticked off the numbers: “200,000 Germans, 200,000 Mexicans, 48,000 Bohemians, 60,000 Scandinavians.” There were even several Japanese settlements.⁸² “Down there,” George Rankin wrote, referring to South Texas, “is a large mixture of foreign peoples, and the effect upon the customs and usages of the people is marked. They have a somewhat different texture of civilization. Many of the people of foreign extraction have become largely Americanized, it is true, but many of them are as distinctively foreign as though they were living in Continental Europe or in Old Mexico.”⁸³ Such claims differed little from mainstream opinions of Mexican Americans or German Americans. One writer’s assumption, printed in *Harper’s Weekly*, that Mexicans along the Rio Grande were “very different from any population in this country,”⁸⁴ would have struck few as insightful. But difference, even

⁸¹ De León, *Greasers*, xi.

⁸² J. M. Carroll, “A Plea for South Texas,” notes, n.d., James Milton Carroll Collection.

⁸³ Rankin, *The Story of My Life*, 334-335.

⁸⁴ Arnolde De Leon, “Rancheros, Comerciantes, and Trabajadores in South Texas, 1848-1900,” in *Reflections of the Mexican Experience in Texas*, Margarita Melville and Hilda Castillo Phariss, eds. (Houston: Mexican American Studies, University of Houston, 1979), 61.

vitriolic difference, is one thing. Reformers, by emphasizing religion, made such divisions sacred.

Turn-of-the-century religious reformers could not find religion in South Texas. In their minds the region was a great spiritual vacuum, a region not of impure papists but of no faith at all. In 1905, at the annual Texas Baptist Pastors' Conference, Rev. M. M. Wolf of Cuero delivered an address on "Work with the Foreigners of Texas." He claimed that a vast tract of irreligion—South Texas—split the state. He imagined South Texas as a large triangle—containing some sixty counties—with its base along the Rio Grande and its northern tip in Temple (about 70 miles north of Austin). That triangle was full of foreigners, he said, and the *Dallas News* reported that Wolf "was frightened less by the fact that these people were Catholics or Lutherans than by the fact that many of them were nothing at all: that there is a strong tendency toward atheism and infidelity."⁸⁵ The Rev. A. E. Rector, a Methodist, spent much of his career preaching to German- and Spanish-speaking audiences throughout the state. Although "a foreign missionary in one's own homeland sounds contradictory," he reminisced, Rector found pleasure in being one among those "heroic missionaries [who] were struggling on behalf of sheep that seemed, for the most part, to be without spiritual shepherds."⁸⁶ Moral reformers believed that only religion could ensure a people's morality, and they could find no religion in South Texas. Although this was hardly a fair assessment of the region, the reformers' rhetoric would consistently expose the power of politics in making such assumptions.

⁸⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, November 15, 1905.

⁸⁶ A. E. Rector, "Reminiscences of Rev. A. E. Rector," undated manuscript, Elijah L. Shettles Papers.

In the clerical mind, South Texas, lacking in religion, would be a debauched and immoral land, an alien world of runaway vice and unsanctioned sin. “It is true,” wrote George Rankin, “that among these foreign peoples a great many excellent citizens are found — citizens of solid piety, of evangelical faith, devoted to our laws and institutions, and strong in their moral and religious sentiment. But generally speaking this is not the case. Hence throughout South Texas there is not much regard for the Sabbath except as a day of recreation and hilarity; the saloon and the beer garden are popular resorts, and there is great antipathy to prohibition of any form.”⁸⁷ Rankin’s broad claim to regional immorality, however, clearly relied upon criteria defined by political questions. In Texas, as elsewhere, consciousness of racial and ethnic division would ebb and flow. The clerical conception of “South Texas” testifies to the importance of such pressing political issues as prohibition in drawing attention to such divisions. When people attach themselves to such issues, and gain meaning through them, conceptions of race, religion, and region become salient. Prohibition, as a keenly felt moral issue, and as the primary political goal of a generation of religious Texans, fostered notions of absolute division. The reformers created a shared identity and a potent counter-identity. They envisioned a high-stakes battle between a moral community of white evangelicals and a sinful mass of irreligious foreigners. As the prohibition campaigns wore on, and regional voting trends became evident, these divisions acquired a geographic meaning.

In nearly every prohibition election, three areas invariably voted wet, that is, against prohibition: cities, central Texas German country, and those counties located near

⁸⁷ Rankin, *The Story of My Life*, 335-336.

or along the Rio Grande.⁸⁸ From the first statewide prohibition election in 1887 to the state's ratification of the eighteenth Amendment in 1918, activists never forgot this geographic divide. Nor did they hesitate to imbue geography with racial, ethnic, and moral value. Cities had blacks, South Texas had Mexicans, Central Texas had Germans. And they were all immoral. They were all enemies of the prohibitionists' godly crusade. In 1887 S. A. Hayden, editor of the *Texas Baptist and Herald*, wrote that the liquor traffic would be vanquished if not for an unholy alliance of "the worst negroes, the least patriotic foreign element, the saloon men, the gamblers, the outlaws, and the secret anarchists of our state."⁸⁹ Geography dictated failure or success. Every campaign, then, compounded a sense of regional division. Every campaign heightened and disseminated social tension. And every campaign further made "South Texas."

For religious Texans, South Texas became shorthand for opposition to moral reform and all the various attributes associated with it. To religious eyes, South Texas was wherever evangelicalism failed to command respect and authority. It could be the long swath of border counties, the heart of German central Texas, cities such as Houston and Galveston, or all three at once. Politics, not geography, mattered most. At a moment when "South Texas" had emerged from the geography of early statehood but was not yet conceived as an exclusively Tejano province, South Texas meant an alien land of poor morals, inferior races, and corrupt politics.

Moral reformers succeeded, not only because they successfully demonized their opposition (they did), but because they successfully sacralized their own cause as well. The two worked in concert and both were necessary to sustain the crusade. Therefore, if

⁸⁸ Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley: The Southern Strategy of Texas Prohibitionists in the 1880s* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003), 92-3.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley*, 64.

South Texas was debauched, George Rankin wrote, “in North Texas it is vastly different. The population is largely native, and American ideas and customs more largely prevail. There are comparatively few foreign peoples, and their presence and influence are not so much felt in church and state. Protestant Christianity, the public schools and the English language have the right of way. Moral sentiment is in the ascendancy and the saloons have but little influence in politics and social life.”⁹⁰ Over time such assumptions spread, and as they did, they would not tolerate inaction.

Moral reform came with an injunction: to act, to make the world better. Playwright Arthur Miller once wrote that when “political policy is equated with moral right, and opposition to it with diabolical malevolence, the main role of government changes from that of the arbiter to that of the scourge of God.”⁹¹ Although exaggerated, such was the conceiving of “South Texas.” Reformers tried the region before the holy bar and found it lacking. They had to act.

At their most benign, clerics imbued their moral geography with the imperatives of a saving faith. To moderates, the clerical conception of “South Texas” demanded mission work. “While Baptist preachers are constantly hearing calls to go elsewhere, some of them to foreign fields,” Rev. M. M. Wolf said at the 1905 Baptist Pastors’ Conference, “none hear the cry of South Texas.”⁹² The 1898 Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the State Baptist Boards declared the cause of evangelical religion “much stronger in the east, north and west than in the south,” where, he said, “the churches there were left to struggle alone and many have failed under the pressure of foreign

⁹⁰ Rankin, *The Story of My Life*, 335.

⁹¹ Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 30.

⁹² *Dallas Morning News*, November 15, 1905.

population.”⁹³ “We have won out gloriously in the North,” J. M. Carroll said, “But what of the South?” He asked his listeners to “Stop & look back.”⁹⁴ The Baptist Board agreed. Their suggestion was simple: “We must go back and reconquer south Texas.”⁹⁵ Not all reformers, however, would settle for such mild measures. The clerical image of South Texas was more virulent than these moderates imagined.

In 1887 J. B. Cranfill, an ardent prohibitionist and Baptist newspaper publisher, editorialized that “it will be a late day when they [those Cranfill called “the native white Anglo-Saxon element of the South”] submit to having their institutions destroyed, their sacred days profaned, and their public buildings defaced by negroes and low-bred foreigners.”⁹⁶ The same impetus that fueled disfranchisement fanned the flames of ethnic division. As political defeats piled up, reformers realized that missionaries and mere politics would never be enough for success. Moral reformers, then, turned to other means. When Samuel Palmer Brooks, the president of Baylor University, expressed interest in running for the United States Senate, his counterpart at Simmons College, Jefferson D. Sandifer, counseled against it. “If we could disfranchise about 40,000 Mexicans we could elect you to any office in Texas,” Sandifer wrote, otherwise “the political horizon to me is too murky to be very inviting to the president of a Christian college.”⁹⁷ Under such assumptions, and in concert with clerical understandings of rural resistance and African American dissent, reformers worked to effect poll taxes, the white primary, and other means of voter disfranchisement. As the contemporary historian and prohibitionist H. A. Ivy recounted, it took a number of defeats “to bring the great body of the friends of

⁹³ *Dallas Morning News*, October 8, 1898.

⁹⁴ J. M. Carroll, “A Plea for South Texas,” undated notes, James Milton Carroll Collection.

⁹⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, October 8, 1898.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Ivy, *No Saloon in the Valley*, 62.

⁹⁷ J. D. Sandifer to Samuel P. Brooks, July 27, 1914, Samuel P. Brooks Papers.

prohibition in the State to see that the liquor traffic entrenched behind the vagrant and mercenary vote in the cities, and behind the foreign-born and the negro vote in central and South Texas counties could not be dislodged by a precinct or county vote.”⁹⁸ Clerics not only attempted to defeat their opponents in politics, they worked to undermine their legitimacy as participants in American public life. Even where legal disfranchisement failed, cultural expulsion effected the same divisive results.

Some Texans spoke against the moralists’ divisiveness. Tolerance became entwined with anticlericalism. In 1911 a number of leading anti-prohibitionists, including the prominent businessmen George Littlefield and John Kirby, published an open letter condemning the rigid social vision of moral reformers. They claimed the liquor question “has passed beyond the mere prohibition question” into a clash of civilizations, that it was dividing the population with the “weapon of religious terrorism, ostracism and outlawry.”⁹⁹ José Tomás Canales, a wealthy landowner who for twenty-six years served as the only Mexican Texan in the Texas House of Representatives,¹⁰⁰ spoke often “to give a word to this American element that criticizes and despises us,” to prove that Mexican Texans were not the unthinking pawns of political bosses.¹⁰¹ At the 1908 Democratic State Convention in San Antonio, former state senator Jonathan Lane spoke against the prohibitionists’ indictment of South Texas. Lane believed “there was good in all men, from negro to Governor. ... In South Texas,” he said to applause, “there are from 50,000 to 75,000 Democrats, as good men as the Creator ever made, who have adopted

⁹⁸ H. A. Ivy, *Rum on the Run in Texas: A Brief History of Prohibition in the Lone Star State* (Dallas: Temperance Publishing Company 1910), 35.

⁹⁹ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 17, 1911.

¹⁰⁰ Cynthia Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2009), 28.

¹⁰¹ *El Regidor*, July 14, 1910.

their own habits and ways; who are not drunkards or reprobates, but who feel so deeply upon this proposition that they say that if paternalism is to be submitted for Democracy, no man or set of men can force paternalism upon them.”¹⁰² These men, however, spoke for a losing cause: The moral fervor of reformers grew unabated throughout the early twentieth century. They had imbued their enemies with such virulent difference, and themselves with such righteousness, that their cause could not be stopped.

Clerics had already rallied history to their cause. In restricting black public life and partitioning “South Texas,” the clerics laid further claim to a monopoly on Americanism. They rallied history to their cause and imbued their believers with the convictions of a righteous and patriotic people. Likewise, they castigated a wicked and foreign population that lived within their own land. Surely, they said, the righteous must act. Such conclusions were the culmination of the clerical culture. They brought to clerical followers the burdens and obligations to act.

When World War I rallied the nation against German evils, the clerics stood ready to assume cultural and political leadership. A seamless melding of religious fervor and runaway patriotism vilified the clerics’ opponents. Texas reformers seized their chance and allowed the war’s patriotic fervor to topple the state’s teetering anticlerical resistance.¹⁰³ Nationwide, reformers rallied behind the war and exploited wartime passions.

Prohibitionists decried alcohol as an unaffordable wartime luxury, as the product of unpatriotic German peddlers, and as a threat to soldiers’ health. On the very day that America declared war on the Central Powers, Senator Sheppard appealed to President

¹⁰² *Dallas Morning News*, August 13, 1908.

¹⁰³ Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 354. *New York Times*, August 29, 1916.

Wilson: “Not only could recruiting be improved,” he wrote, but national economic efficiency “would be enormously enhanced, if the liquor traffic could be wiped out.”¹⁰⁴

Texas prohibitionists immediately won minor victories. The legislature established enormous “white zones,” saloon-free land surrounding all military bases.¹⁰⁵

The European conflict unleashed a withering cultural war within the United States. Positioned as the defenders of righteousness and Americanism, the preachers and their allies leveled their opponents. Governor Oscar Colquitt, for instance, still believed he could ride anticlericalism into office and prepared to challenge the ailing Charles Culberson for a U.S. Senate seat in 1916. But Colquitt was a German-American, had his strongest support in the German hill country, had supported the brewers, and had been a vocal critic of administration policies during his time as governor from 1911 to 1915.¹⁰⁶ And so, at a Dallas conference, Senator Culberson bluntly laid out his strategy: “Are the people of Texas going to stand by President Woodrow Wilson or the German Kaiser?”¹⁰⁷ Culberson and his allies were unrelenting, and Colquitt’s support evaporated. On August 26, Culberson, as expected, routed the former anti-prohibition governor. “The overwhelming defeat of Colquitt is regarded as an American victory,” the *New York Times* reported, and the voters of Texas “have shown their resolve to put America first.”¹⁰⁸

Colquitt wasn’t alone. In 1917, a few short months after America’s entry into the war, prohibitionists leveraged their new bases of power against the sitting governor, James Ferguson. When Ferguson made an ill-informed move against the University of

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Gould, 181-2.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Gould, 226-7, 230-3.

¹⁰⁶ Gould, 177-181.

¹⁰⁷ *New York Times*, August 29, 1916.

¹⁰⁸ *New York Times*, August 27, 1916.

Texas, clerics united with progressive Democrats, corporate interests, the university's wealthy alumni, and a newly emboldened women's movement. Together, they moved to impeach the governor for financial impropriety—including, his critics said, secret funds from Texas brewers. The governor's critics combined against him. One protest in the summer of 1917 exposed this new matrix. In front of the capitol, on Congress Avenue, demonstrators erected a small speaking platform decorated with orange and white [the colors of the university] bunting and two orange, eight-foot banners reading "Women of Texas Protest." Women's leaders spoke throughout the day, but near midnight the protest moved to a nearby park and Methodist Reverend "fighting Bob" Shuler delivered a raucous condemnation of the governor.¹⁰⁹ All of the governor's opponents united. Women emerged from political exile.¹¹⁰ The clerical ambivalence toward female political participation crumbled. In the shadow of the national movement, the onslaught of progressive women added to an already substantial anti-Ferguson stampede.

In Texas, Ferguson's agrarian strain of anticlericalism depended upon a volatile mix of personality and rural alienation. In an expanding industrial state, it rested upon an eroding rural foundation, one already wrecked by across-the-board voting restrictions. Moreover, the movement depended upon one man's magnetic personality. Ferguson's anticlericalism was unsustainable, and may have unraveled naturally with time. But

¹⁰⁹ Jane Y. McCallum, "Activities of Women in Texas Politics," in *Texas Democracy*, ed. Frank Carter Adams (Austin: Democratic Historical Association, 1937), 474-76.

¹¹⁰ This coincided with regional trends. See Dewey W. Grantham, "The Contours of Southern Progressivism," *The American Historical Review* 86 (December, 1981), 1051-2. The political aspirations of Texas women were generally fostered outside of the evangelical churches. While defending "the home" and proclaiming the virtues of pure womanhood, Lone Star clerics demonstrated a sustained ambivalence towards public roles for women. The public enfranchisement of women was generally cultivated within secular women's clubs and elite, mainline churches. See especially Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas, 1893-1918* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); and Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women, Culture, and Community: Religion and Reform in Galveston, 1880-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

before that could be seen, the war tipped the balance. In the shadow of the war, clerics moved freely.

A court of impeachment decided against the governor, and he resigned. Opponents had finally toppled the state's anticlerical movement. Ferguson vowed to return. He tried the following year. He chastised a train of political opponents—now grown quite long—but reserved special animosity for religious leaders. “Oh, you political preachers,” he said, “don’t ever think I’m afraid of you, because I am going to continue to skin you from hell to Haw River like I’ve always done.”¹¹¹ He wouldn’t get the chance. By 1918 his brand of anticlerical demagoguery had expired.

The ground had shifted. In the summer of 1911 anticlerics filled the Fort Worth Coliseum to castigate political preachers. In the fall of 1918 the renowned evangelist Billy Sunday filled the same building to capacity to tell the crowd that “The trouble is we have no God in American politics.”¹¹² The war crowned the clerical crusade. Religious leaders won all the momentum. Now they were the ones filling arenas with supporters and winning elections. And they won their ultimate victory.

The war caught the entire country in a wave of reform. “We must reckon with that fact that the war set Prohibition ahead from five to ten years,” wrote General Superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League and Methodist minister Dr. P. A. Baker.¹¹³ Wartime fervor accomplished what clerical partisans had fought for decades to achieve. Suddenly, a national movement coalesced. In 1917 Texas Senator Morris Sheppard, the committed Methodist, former member of the Epworth League, and veteran of the clerical

¹¹¹ *Dallas Morning News*, July 27, 1918.

¹¹² *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 25, 1918.

¹¹³ P. A. Baker, “An Appeal to the Pastors and Churches,” undated manuscript. Benejah Harvey Carroll Collection.

insurgency, authored the bill that became the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America: national prohibition. Texas could hardly move quickly enough to beat the passage of the national amendment with a law of its own.

Governor William P. Hobby acceded to the times. Realizing that he could no longer stand in the way of prohibition, he relented. He had delayed as long as he could, but in February 1918 he called a special session of the state legislature to pass a prohibition law. It passed overwhelmingly and with little controversy. The state legislature meanwhile ratified the national prohibition amendment and made an effort to amend the state constitution in a similar manner. The prohibition measures passed that year.¹¹⁴

The war stifled the state's anticlerical rhetoric. "More than any other cause," political historian Lewis Gould wrote, "the war decided the outcome of the 1918 contest and produced the dry victory." He added that, "In Texas, the conflict swept away most of the barriers in the way of the dry progressives and established them as the dominant faction within the party. Their supremacy was secure." The battle that had consumed state politics for so many years was finally over, one more casualty of the war.¹¹⁵

The glow of World War I and its particularly virulent strain of 100-percent-Americanism reversed decades of anticlerical victories and vaulted the battered crusaders into cultural and constitutional triumph. The agrarian challenge unraveled. Anticlericalism's cultural power evaporated. Unable to rival the clerics' acute cultural impulses and profound institutional resources, anticlericalism collapsed.

¹¹⁴ Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 242-8.

¹¹⁵ Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 242-8.

However narrowly conceived, the politics of prohibition masked a fundamental transformation. It demarcated the breaking point between the state's anticlerical past and the religious-political history of the future. No longer would religious leaders languish helplessly before a repressive culture. No longer would they be confined to their pulpits and to matters only of the eternal soul. Armed with prohibition, the state's clerical leadership broke the long history of public detachment in Texas. Prominent clergymen dared challenge the culture of anticlericalism—and they triumphed. Never again would their political ventures be so easily and reflexively challenged. Never again would their ambitions be so restrained.

Religious Texans greeted the dawn of the Bible Belt. Even before the war laid waste to their anticlerical opponents, they knew that triumph awaited. Bishop Mouzon had recognized that “we can do anything that ought to be done.”¹¹⁶ Texas and the South and the nation all recognized the coming of the Bible Belt. Religious leaders reveled in their new roles of public authority. As Baptist preacher William Tardy wrote in 1920: “We are the heirs of all the ages, we are the wearers of the crown, and the bearers of the scepter.”¹¹⁷ The culmination of history, the arbiters of righteousness, the lynchpin of a nation: the clerics had triumphed. They had made the Bible Belt.

¹¹⁶ Edwin Mouzon to Clarence Ousley, January 15, 1913, Edwin D. Mouzon Papers, Archives, Center for Methodist Studies at Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

¹¹⁷ William T Tardy, *The Man and the Message* (Marshall, Tex.: Mrs. W. T. Tardy, 1920), 185.

CONCLUSION

In 1920, after living in Fort Worth for three months, E. S. Brackton wrote to the *Star-Telegram* to ask “if there is a church in the city of Fort Worth where a man may go and hear the gospel preached, where the minister takes his text from the Bible?” The man said he and his wife, both Baptists, visited one of the city’s renowned congregations “but were forced to listen to discussions of local questions, political and otherwise, in which we were not interested, but not one word of religion or the teaching of Jesus Christ did we hear.” The next week they tried a church in another denomination. “The theme of the preacher was the qualifications of a certain man to be Governor of Texas,” Brackton reported. “I have not been in Texas long enough to be familiar with or interested in its politics, but even if I had I would not expect to go to church for political information, but to hear the gospel of Christ.” Brackton feared he might need to sample every church in the city to find a pulpit where he and wife “could go to hear the gospel preached.” He asked for the *Star-Telegram*’s advice. “Any church will do,” he said, “just so religion is preached and not politics.”¹

The passage of the Eighteenth Amendment heralded the power of the Bible Belt. Southern clericalism appeared not as a constrained, locally embattled movement, but as a national passion, a new phenomenon without borders, limits, or muted ambitions. It had been, or was in the process of becoming, Americanized. The clerics spread their ideas across the country. They sent apostles into the world. Bible Belt southerners poured into the rest of the nation. They settled in midwestern cities and the rising west and they

¹ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 10, 1920.

carried the clerical culture with them. Clerical activists, steeled by decades of conflict, carried with them a political theology, a will to fight, and a distinct worldview: they carried the culture of the Bible Belt.

In his award-winning *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, Darren Dochuk charts the southernization of the Sun Belt by evangelical southern migrants during the Great Depression. The migrants carried with them, Dochuk writes, a “Texas theology”: an uncompromising missionary creed, a sense of Christian nationalism, and a “faith blended with politics.”² Bible Belt southerners blended activism and dynamism and conquered areas such as Southern California. The origins of the Texas theology provide the key to understanding the politicization of southern religion, the formation of the religious right, and the history of modern America.

Bible Belt southerners rooted their religion across the nation. Texas supplied more than its fair share. Two Texas fundamentalists, in particular, shepherded the clerical culture into the 1920s and spread their fighting faith across the country. Both nurtured a pugilist’s faith forged in the prohibition battles of the early-twentieth century. Both trafficked in images of a “Christian nation,” stressed moral warfare, and rallied the faithful toward political causes. The first, Robert “Fighting Bob” Shuler, electrified Los Angeles in the 1920s. Applying the lessons learned in the Texas prohibition crusades, Shuler shocked the city with his fierce faith and uncompromising moralism. Soon he operated one of the largest and most influential churches in the West.³ His compatriot, J.

² Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), xvii, xix.

³ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 31, 241; James Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 225-7.

Frank Norris, operated one of the largest in the country. According to the title of one recent biographical work, he was “The Pastor of America's First Megachurch.”⁴ In Fort Worth, Norris, “The Texas Tornado,” applied the skills and tactics honed during the prohibition campaigns to savage opponents. He too spread notions of a Christian nation, led moral crusades during the 1920s, and, like Shuler, proselytized his fundamentalist faith across the county.⁵ “I’m going to give ‘em hell,” he said.⁶ At home, he inspired a young W. A. Criswell, one of the leading lights of postwar American fundamentalism. Norris traveled across the country to indict the “modern Babylons.” During the 1930s, he started a second church in Detroit, Michigan. Norris exported the Bible Belt. The clerical culture translated easily to the Midwest. By the 1940s, Norris preached to a larger congregational following than any American had in history.⁷

The impossibilities of enforcement and lingering cultural resentments doomed national prohibition. Consigned to a punch line in American historical memory, the clerics’ groundbreaking achievement unraveled around them. While clerics scrambled to defend the law throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, and maintained bastions of dry counties into the present day, scandal condemned the Eighteenth Amendment. In 1933, the Twenty-First Amendment repealed national prohibition and forever discredited the crowning accomplishment of the clerical insurgency. But it didn’t matter. While clerics rode prohibition into public prominence, the attendant triumph of the clerical culture steeled religious activists against defeat. The clerics’ triumph over the denominations,

⁴ David R. Stokes, *Apparent Danger: The Pastor of America’s First Megachurch and the Texas Murder Trial of the Decade in the 1920s* (Minneapolis: Bascom Hill Books, 2010).

⁵ Barry Hankins, *God’s Rascal: J. Frank Norris & the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

⁶ *New York Times*, March 26, 1922.

⁷ Hankins, *God’s Rascal*; David R. Stokes, *The Shooting Salvationist: J. Frank Norris and the Murder Trial that Captivated America* (Hanover, N.H.: Steerforth Press, 2011).

deployment of righteousness, and belief in Christian nationalism buoyed the movement beyond any single issue. Secure in the Bible Belt, they weathered repeal and fostered a regional culture that transformed the course of modern American history.

While Texas clerics nourished the southernization of American religious life, they also tended their own bounded Zion. The clerical culture dominated Texas life after the First World War. In government offices, school buildings, and public culture, the Bible Belt reigned. On January 16, 1923, Governor Pat Neff acknowledged the burden of his oath of office by “kissing the leaves of God’s Book,” and proclaiming his “deep consciousness of the responsibility that goes with it.”⁸ A generation earlier, Governor Oran Roberts scorned official proclamations that could be seen as blurring the separation of church and state. Riding the crest of the clerical movement, Governor Pat Neff delighted in them. “I greet you with the wish that the spirit of Christ may dwell in the hearts of our people,” he said in his 1922 Christmas greeting. After acknowledging “this Government founded under His guidance,”⁹ he surveyed the gains of a Christian Texas. “Church bells and school bells ring in symphony a glad acclaim to the splendor of our civilization,” he said. He praised the Bible Belt. He had assisted in its construction and now, as governor, he marked its maturation. A committed Baptist, Baylor graduate, prohibitionist, champion of disfranchising electoral reforms, and later the president of the Baptist university, Neff spoke the clerical idiom. It would later be said of George W. Bush that he did not so much appeal to the religious right, as he was a part of it. It could

⁸ Pat M. Neff, *Speeches Delivered by Pat M. Neff, Governor of Texas, Discussing Certain Phases of Contemplated Legislation*, (Austin, Tex.: Von Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1923) 57.

⁹ Neff, *Speeches Delivered*, 60.

be said, then, that Pat Neff did not court the makers of the Bible Belt so much as he helped make it. And as governor, he laid the capstone.¹⁰ But he was not alone.

By 1926, Texas's 15,000 churches outnumbered any other state. From these pulpits, clerics wielded unprecedented influence. In 1928, Baptist fundamentalist J. Frank Norris and moderate Methodist Bishop Edwin Mouzon, both leaders in the prohibition crusades, joined with regional allies and loosed much of the South from the party of the fathers. Opposing the Catholic and anti-prohibitionist, Democratic presidential candidate, clerics ripped parts of the South away from the Democratic candidate. For the first time since Reconstruction, and owing to religious and moral issues, the South abandoned the Democrats. Although brief, this exodus shattered a long political history and harkened the coming of a seismic political reorientation. Other clerics traveled along equally radical paths.

At a 1922 rally against the Senate "Kandidate," Earle Mayfield, the defeated Governor James Ferguson brought Rev. Kittrell, a 71-year-old Church of Christ preacher, on stage to excoriate preachers for mixing religion with politics and supporting the Klan and prohibition. He griped that "90 percent of the Protestant preachers are in the Klan" and denounced "the man who wears the clerical robe and drags it into the mire of politics."¹¹ The aging preacher recalled the old anticlerical culture, but he also represented its obsolescence. That Ferguson relied upon a septuagenarian preacher from a dissenting sect spoke volumes about the state of political religion in the Lone Star State. Ferguson's anticlerical brand of politics had expired. Mayfield won a Senate seat and

¹⁰ For Neff, see Norman D. Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug: Texas Politics, 1921-1928* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 1984); and Mark Stanley, "Portrait of a southern Progressive: The Political Life and Times of Governor Pat M. Neff of Texas, 1871-1952" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Texas, 2011).

¹¹ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 20, 1922.

served opposite the Christian Nationalist Morris Sheppard. While many Protestants opposed the extremes of the Klan, the hooded warriors attracted legions of clerical warriors with their public promotion of prohibition and moral righteousness.¹²

While clerics continued their political march, some with hoods, some turned back from the secular world and refocused themselves on purifying what they perceived as an insufficiently rigorous religious world. The birth of fundamentalism owed much to the clerical impulse. They turned their hunger for purity inward against modernists and moderate Christians. In Texas and elsewhere, fundamentalists rocked the religious establishment. Major denominations dealt with fundamentalist insurgencies. The modernist/fundamentalist conflict ruptured Texas Baptists and rocked Baylor University. From Fort Worth, J. Frank Norris and the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary thundered their denunciations against modernism. Norris slammed Baylor and faculty at the Seminary contributed several articles to *The Fundamentals*, the series of religious booklets that gave the fundamentalists their name. But Baptists weren't alone. Texas Methodists fought over fundamentalist theology in their universities. Disciples, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians did the same.¹³

In 1924, renegade fundamentalists established Dallas Theological Seminary. In the same city, Cyrus Scofield held several pastorates and spread the gospel of fundamentalism across the world with his monumental best-seller, *The Scofield Reference Bible*. Together, Scofield and the seminary popularized dispensationalism, a

¹² See especially Nancy MacLean *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2011).

¹³ David Stricklin, "FUNDAMENTALISM," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/itf01>), accessed April 10, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

peculiar form of fundamentalist eschatology that proclaimed God's control over history and the coming end times.¹⁴ In Fort Worth, Norris combined clerical politics and a strident brand of fundamentalism in attracting a congregation of unparalleled size.¹⁵ Bob Shuler blended the same ingredients before moving West and applying that powerful brew at his Southern California megachurch.¹⁶ The triumph of the clerical culture offers a qualitative confirmation of sociological hypotheses about religion: in a competitive religious market, the most strident and demanding faiths will excel in attracting membership.¹⁷ Clerics proved this principle in their rise to power, and Norris, Shuler, and other fundamentalists proved it in theirs.

The rise of fundamentalism provoked many of the same controversies that famously crystallized during the 1925 Scopes "monkey" Trial in Tennessee. In 1923, two years before the famous Tennessee law barring evolution in schools, a Baptist minister joined with a Baptist layman and co-sponsored an anti-evolution bill in the Texas state legislature. Similar impulses washed across the state. In 1925, the University of Texas blocked the employment of any "infidel, atheist, or agnostic." During the 1920s, clerics continued their conquest of public life, targeted moderate Christians, and testified to the power of the American Bible Belt. Nevertheless, the resistance to these new manifestations of the clerical culture testified to lingering, if limited, hesitations.¹⁸

Critics lurked within the confines of the new Bible Belt. Although purged from office, James Ferguson remained a thorn in the side of the clerical movement and rallied

¹⁴ Michael Phillips, *White Metropolis: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion in Dallas, Texas, 1841-2001* (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 2006), 47-56.

¹⁵ Hankins, *God's Rascal*.

¹⁶ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 31; Gregory, *Southern Diaspora*, 225-227.

¹⁷ See especially Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Stricklin, "FUNDAMENTALISM."

the lasting strands of anticlerical resentment and populist discontent against clerical politicians. As moral warriors deserted economic issues, Ferguson remained. As one backer proclaimed in 1918, “Jim Ferguson is the only Governor Texas ever had that ever attempted to do anything for the masses who earn their bread by the sweat [sic] of their brow.”¹⁹ Ferguson exploited rifts in the Democratic Party and returned to the governor’s mansion with the election of wife, Miriam, in 1924. The departing governor, Pat Neff, left an open Bible in the governor’s office with an underlined verse that urged the reader’s word to illuminate God’s path. Ferguson closed the Bible and threw it in a corner of the office. “Sunday School is dismissed,” he reportedly said.²⁰

Anticlerical rumblings persisted. In 1929, for instance, state representative J. Lewis Thompson of Houston said political preachers have “reflected no credit to the State or church” and proposed a constitutional amendment barring preachers and priests from holding elected office.²¹ But Thompson’s and Ferguson’s tactics were threadbare. The embattled Ferguson stumbled. The old anticleric continued to fight against prohibition and he attacked the Klan but by the 1920s his politics had become an anachronism.

The clerical triumph reverberated across the following decades. While the Klan’s bigoted moralism faded from view, fundamentalist megachurches and religious politics continued to dominate the state. Morris Sheppard championed a Christian nationalism in the Senate until his death in 1941. W. Lee “Pappy” O’Daniel combined modern media, religious appeals, and anti-New Deal conservatism into a powerful movement during his

¹⁹ W. H. Basden to W. P. Hobby, June 23, 1918, Alexander Dienst Collection, 1784–1929, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

²⁰ Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug*, 254.

²¹ *The Tulia Herald*, February 14, 1929.

tenures as governor and United States senator in the 1930s and 1940s. Baptists J. Frank Norris and George Truett pastored influential megachurches in Fort Worth and Dallas, respectively, throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s and 1940s.²² They shaped a new generation of religious leaders. Norris's hard-edged faith inspired a generation of fighting fundamentalists that included W. A. Criswell, Truett's successor at Dallas's First Baptist. He ascended to the pulpit there in 1944 and grew the already sprawling megachurch into the largest and most influential in the Southern Baptist Convention. Criswell, a fundamentalist, anti-Civil Rights activist, anti-communist, and architect of the Baptists' postwar conservative resurgence, laid the groundwork for the formation of the religious right.²³ Criswell's church also claimed America's most notable evangelist, Billy Graham, as a member for over half a century. Graham's national crusades launched a national evangelical resurgence.²⁴ In Texas, he found fertile ground. He capped his Lone Star efforts with Explo '72, a 1972 ecumenical Dallas crusade that Graham called the "religious Woodstock." 80,000 youth filled the Cotton Bowl and heard Graham and other leaders urge them to bring the words of Jesus Christ to every American.²⁵

Amid this spiritual explosion, the anticlerical tradition flickered. Shreds of memory still pulled on some Texans. It was no accident, for instance, that John F. Kennedy chose an audience of Houston ministers to hear his defense of religious liberty and absolute separation of church and state in 1960. Meanwhile, some religious leaders

²² Hankins, *God's Rascal*; Keith E. Durso, *Thy Will Be Done: A Biography of George W. Truett* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2009).

²³ Dick J. Reavis, "The Politics of Armageddon," *Texas Monthly*, October, 1984, 162-166. See also David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1999).

²⁴ Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

²⁵ *LIFE*, June 30, 1972, 40-45; John G. Turner, *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 139-146;

resisted an open alliance with resurgent conservatism. Despite their history of political activism, the Baptist General Convention rebuffed fundamentalists and refused to fully align itself with the religious right during the late-twentieth century.²⁶ But these holdouts represented little of the sea change shaping southern religion. By the end of the twentieth-century, divisions between politics and religion collapsed. Activists wed the Republican party to conservative religion and enthroned the religious right as the heirs of the Bible Belt, as the evolutionary culmination of a century-old clerical triumph.²⁷

There's an old hymn the Methodists sing called "A Charge to Keep I Have." George W. Bush adored it. He sang it at a private church service the day he became Texas governor and later titled his autobiography after it. Two months after arriving in Austin, Bush hung a blue-toned oil painting in the governor's office depicting a weary Methodist circuit rider traveling a rugged mountain road. (The horseman bore an uncanny resemblance to Bush.) Bush sent a memo to his staff: he wanted them to see and reflect upon the painting. He said the painting was based on the hymn, and he took the opportunity to cite his favorite verse, which urged its listeners "to serve the present age" by "do[ing] my Master's will." The painting inspired Bush to act, to fulfill *his* charge: he would bring God to government. "This is our mission," he said. And referring to the horseman, he added, "This is us." The painting remained on his office wall until, in 2000, it moved with Bush to Washington, D.C. and found a place on the walls of the Oval Office. In interviews, President Bush cited the painting as an inspiring emblem of

²⁶ Blake Ellis, "An Alternative Politics: Texas Baptists and the Rise of the Christian Right, 1975-1985," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 112 (April 2009), 361-386.

²⁷ Darren K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

America's religious heritage and a personal reminder of his own sacred charge.²⁸ For historians, it hung as a testament to the culmination of the clerical triumph. By harkening to the rugged circuit rider, the painting testified to the makers of the Bible Belt.

Today, religion and politics collide and cast their shadow over American life. In recent years the Bible Belt has gifted the nation's political prayer rallies, school board battles, and faith-based presidencies. President George W. Bush, the born-again Methodist, perfected the alliance of conservative politics and conservative religion. In his WallBuilders organization and in his many best-selling books, Texan David Barton, a Republican leader and evangelical minister, assails the "myth" of church-state separation while leading the charge to rebrand America's history as that of a "Christian nation" and. In late 2011, Rick Perry believed he could launch a successful bid for the Republican presidential nomination with appeals to a Christian America. He launched his campaign with a massive prayer rally in Houston's Reliant Stadium, decried a "war on Christianity," and topped the polls before a series of political stumbles doomed his campaign. These are only the most recent manifestations of the state's religious and political influence. As historians push back the history of political religion in American history, they must comprehend and appreciate the earth-shattering transformations wrought by the clerical activists of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

²⁸ George W. Bush, *A Charge to Keep: My Journey to the White House* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 45. Critics tell a different tale: they say the German-born illustrator W.H.D. Koerner painted "A Charge to Keep" in 1915 for a story in *The Saturday Evening Post* called "The Slipper Tongue." The story peddled the era's typical dime-novel western fare—Koerner illustrated westerns, not devotionals. The painting was not of a heroic missionary leading his followers but of a horse thief fleeing a lynch mob. Koerner's illustration appeared with the caption: "Had His Start Been Fifteen Minutes Longer, He Would Not Have Been Caught." The painting was recycled in 1916 for another western, then reused again the following year in the *Country Gentleman* for a short story called "A Charge to Keep." Only in that final story did the painting receive its sanctification, its new title, and its presidential destiny. There the horse thief became the circuit rider. This account was first published in Jacob Weisberg's polemical *The Bush Tragedy* (New York: Random House, 2008). See also Scott Horton, "The Illustrated President," *Harper's Magazine*, January 2008.

From those pivotal decades emerged a new religious history. Politics would ever after be colored by God, and every issue and candidate refracted through some sacred lens. The battle for the Bible Belt produced the South of Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell, of the Scopes Trial and Fundamentalism, and of David Barton and George W. Bush. They are the heirs of clericalism, the children of the Bible Belt, the sum of battles fought and won a century ago. The clerical triumph paved the way for their emergence.

From a freewheeling religious world in which anticlerical critics scourged political preachers, religious activists toppled a meek and otherworldly faith, conquered and reinforced their denominations, and sallied forth in public life to demolish the final lingering barriers to the Bible Belt. Clerical crusaders tamed a freewheeling religious world, crafted a new American history, taught their disciples to think in terms of a “Christian nation,” imparted a distinct and privileged cultural station for their righteous followers, organized politically, and stifled anticlerical resistance through issues such as prohibition. The clerics’ unrelenting activism transformed the American South and, soon thereafter, the entire nation. The clerics made the Bible Belt. They created a place where not only, as Mencken phrased it, “Beelzebub is still as real as Babe Ruth,” they constructed a world in which Christian heroes laid the foundations for a Christian republic and in which Christian activists felt compelled to entangle themselves inextricably with public life.²⁹ The Bible Belt drained political religion of controversy and convinced anxious Americans that faith should be a force in the secular world. Such is the legacy of the clerical triumph. And it lingers still.

²⁹ H. L. Mencken, *Prejudices: Fifth Series* (New York: Knopf, 1926), 111.

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